

Construction and Implementation of Kindergarten Food Education Curriculum Based on Huizhou Food Culture

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The purpose of food education is to cultivate healthy lifestyles in children. Huizhou food culture embodies healthful dietary concepts such as “eating in season”, “light and original flavors”, and “balanced meat-and-vegetable combinations”, making it a valuable educational resource for kindergarten food education curricula. By constructing a three-part curriculum system comprising dietary cognition, dietary practice, and dietary culture, and by implementing it through a collaborative home-kindergarten-community pathway involving thematic kindergarten courses, family experience activities, and community practice activities, kindergartens can achieve the dual goals of “health-oriented education” and “cultural inheritance”.

Keywords: Huizhou food culture, food education curriculum, kindergarten

Food education is by no means a short-term weight-control or “dieting” intervention, but rather a deep nourishment that reshapes dietary cognition, cultivates lifestyle habits, and immerses children in food culture. Its core is to foster healthy lifestyles that benefit children throughout their lives. The Outline for Children’s Development in China (2021-2030) explicitly calls for “strengthening food education, guiding scientific and balanced eating, balancing food intake with physical activity, and preventing and controlling childhood overweight and obesity”. In 2026, the Ministry of Education’s Guiding Opinions on Comprehensively Advancing the Construction of Healthy Schools further clarified the need to “strengthen students’ education on reasonable dietary and nutritional health”. These demonstrate the state’s strong emphasis on children’s healthy growth, placing physical and mental health at the forefront of students’ holistic development, and pointing the way forward for food education in the new era. Huizhou food culture embodies health concepts such as light and nourishing eating, balanced diets, seasonal appropriateness, and thrift and etiquette. Carrying out food education based on Huizhou food culture in kindergartens is precisely a practice of transforming the educational philosophy of “health first” into a localized, life-oriented, and sustainable health education practice.

Health Concepts Embedded in Huizhou Food Culture

The core of early childhood dietary nutrition education is to cultivate healthy dietary behaviors. The key to food education is not short-term behavioral control but rather establishing healthy and positive dietary concepts and forming conscious healthy eating habits. At the kindergarten stage, the focus of food education should be on

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cultivating healthy dietary behaviors in young children, helping them establish good self-feeding practices, and developing healthy habits of regular eating and combining diet with exercise. Through healthy eating and scientific physical activity, the risk of childhood overweight and obesity can be reduced, supporting children's healthy growth. The Guidelines for Infant Feeding and Nutrition in Nursery Institutions (Trial) states that “children should be enabled to feel, recognize, and enjoy food, to cultivate good eating behaviors and dietary habits, and to be introduced to Chinese food culture”. Huizhou food culture, with its healthful dietary concepts, serves as an organic vehicle for kindergartens to carry out food education centered on “scientific diet and healthy growth”, enabling the organic integration of health-oriented education and cultural inheritance.

The Principle of “Eating in Season, Following Nature”

The principle of “eating in season, following nature” embodies a health wisdom that respects natural laws and the unity of heaven and humanity. Influenced by the subtropical monsoon climate—with concurrent rain and heat, four distinct seasons, and more mountains than flat land—these natural factors give rise to abundant seasonal ingredients and make “eating according to the season” a core tenet of Huizhou food culture. Huizhou people have long followed the dietary rhythm of “eating sprouts in spring, melons in summer, fruits in autumn, and roots in winter”. In spring, they harvest mountain bamboo shoots and Qingming greens; in summer, they consume stone ear fungus and water chestnuts; in autumn, they enjoy chestnuts and hickory nuts; and in winter, they simmer ham with winter bamboo shoots and kudzu root soup. This food selection philosophy is essentially a pursuit of freshness and nutritional value. Seasonal ingredients not only taste better but also align with the physiological needs of young children in different seasons: promoting growth in spring, relieving summer heat, moistening the lungs and heart in autumn, and nourishing qi and blood in winter. The Guidelines also requires “choosing safe, nutritious, and fresh ingredients” to ensure the scientific adequacy of children's nutritional intake.

The Culinary Philosophy of “Light and Original Flavors, Gentle Nourishment”

The culinary philosophy of “light and original flavors, gentle nourishment” practices the principles of a healthy diet with reduced salt, sugar, and seasonings. Huizhou cuisine places great emphasis on cooking techniques, particularly excelling in braising, steaming, and simmering, with a focus on preserving the “original flavor, original taste, and original form” of ingredients to retain their inherent nutrition and flavor. Whether it is Huizhou steamed cakes, stewed chicken soup, simmered tofu, or boiled wild vegetables, all adhere to using less oil, less sugar, and fewer seasonings. This not only avoids the burden on the body caused by excessive intake of fats and sugars but also maximizes the retention of vitamins, dietary fiber, and other nutrients in the ingredients. This aligns with the Guidelines requirement that “food should be properly cooked... preferably using steaming, boiling, stewing, and simmering methods”, and is better suited to young children's delicate digestive systems. The cognitive message conveyed by this culinary philosophy—that “lightness equals health”—can help children establish correct dietary preferences from an early age and effectively prevent overweight and obesity.

The Dietary Philosophy of “Balanced Meat-and-Vegetable Combinations, Medicine and Food Sharing the Same Origin”

The dietary philosophy of “balanced meat-and-vegetable combinations, medicine and food sharing the same origin” reflects a pursuit of balanced nourishment and preventive health. Although Huizhou cuisine is primarily vegetarian, it emphasizes the combination of meat and vegetables, and the complementarity of staple and side dishes. It ensures the intake of plant-based foods such as grains, vegetables, and mountain delicacies, while also incorporating moderate amounts of animal-based ingredients like freshwater fish and poultry, achieving a

balanced supply of protein, dietary fiber, minerals, and other nutrients, and avoiding the nutritional imbalances that come with a monotonous diet. This meets the Guidelines requirement for “balanced food combinations... achieving dietary diversity”. At the same time, Huizhou cuisine deeply integrates the Xin’an medical school’s concept of “medicine and food sharing the same origin”, combining everyday ingredients with health preservation. For example, it advocates using astragalus and ginseng to tonify qi and strengthen the stomach and spleen, and using honeysuckle and chrysanthemum to clear heat and reduce internal heat. This makes food not merely sustenance but a vehicle for nourishing the body and preventing disease. This health concept of “therapeutic diet integration” and “strengthening the foundation and cultivating vitality” can guide children to understand the meaning of “diet as health preservation” and gradually establish a health concept of “balanced diet and preventive care”.

These health concepts embedded in Huizhou food culture are not abstract theories but concrete practices integrated into daily eating, suitable for the requirements of “life-oriented, play-based, and scientific” food education for young children. Integrating these concepts into kindergarten food education and constructing a kindergarten food education curriculum based on Huizhou food culture allow children to subtly absorb healthy dietary influences while perceiving the charm of Huizhou food culture. It enables this localized cultural vehicle to take root, achieving the dual value of “health-oriented education” and “cultural inheritance”.

Constructing the Content of the Kindergarten Food Education Curriculum Based on Huizhou Food Culture

Huizhou food culture embodies health concepts such as “eating in season”, “light and original flavors”, and “balanced meat-and-vegetable combinations”. Based on national policy guidelines, and taking into account children’s age characteristics and cognitive development, adhering to the principles of “life-orientation, play-orientation, and localization”, the kindergarten has constructed a three-part curriculum system covering cognition, practice, and culture. This ensures that health concepts, cultural inheritance, and habit formation run throughout the curriculum, achieving the goal of “educating through food”. Table 1 presents the kindergarten food education curriculum based on Huizhou food culture, with activities organized thematically and encompassing the three specific content areas of cognition, practice, and culture.

Table 1

Content of the Kindergarten Food Education Curriculum Based on Huizhou Food Culture

Theme title	Specific content	Main objectives
First taste of Huizhou flavors	Getting to know Huizhou cuisine	Recognize characteristic Huizhou dishes such as Huizhou sesame cakes, hairy tofu, and stinky mandarin fish
	Five-senses experience	Smell, touch, see, and taste Huizhou specialty ingredients
	Delicious classification	Learn to classify foods by color and shape
Exploring Huizhou delicacies	Food map	Create a Huizhou food map, marking the origins of specialty foods
	Ingredient treasure	Hunt search for Huizhou specialty ingredients in supermarkets or markets
	Taste memory	Build memory of Huizhou flavors through tasting
Little Huizhou	Chefs making Qingming cakes	Learn to make Qingming cakes and understand Qingming Festival customs
	Making zongzi	Experience making zongzi and learn about Dragon Boat Festival culture
	Making mooncakes	Make simple mooncakes and understand the symbolism of the Mid-Autumn Festival
Huizhou flavors in solar terms	Spring Equinox wild vegetables	Recognize spring wild vegetables and make wild vegetable pancakes
	Eating eggs at Lixia (start of summer)	Learn to weave egg pouches and understand Lixia customs
	Winter Solstice dumpling feast	Make dumplings and learn about Winter Solstice food culture

First, the construction of “cognitive” curriculum content aims to solidify children’s foundational dietary knowledge. The cognitive content focuses on Huizhou ingredients, seasonal foods, and cultural knowledge, aligning with young children’s intuitive and perceptual learning characteristics. In thematic activities such as “Getting to Know Huizhou Cuisine”, teachers guide children to recognize local Huizhou specialty ingredients, such as hairy tofu and stinky mandarin fish. Children learn about the growing environment, physical characteristics, and nutritional value of these ingredients, distinguishing between different types of foods such as vegetables, grains, and mountain delicacies. In line with the concept of “eating in season”, seasonal dietary cognitive content is designed—for example, recognizing wild vegetables and spring bamboo shoots in spring—helping children understand the connection between diet and the seasons.

Second, the construction of “practical” curriculum content aims to cultivate good dietary behaviors in children. Practice is the core of food education for young children. The curriculum content is designed to incorporate Huizhou food characteristics by providing operable and participatory practical activities, while integrating positive habits such as “cherishing food, eating regularly, and self-feeding”. Activities such as “Making Qingming Cakes”, “Making Zongzi”, and “Making Mooncakes” allow children to experience the joy of labor through kneading, rolling, wrapping, and steaming, while also experiencing Huizhou’s light cooking methods. Through participation in washing ingredients, setting up, and distributing food, children develop habits of self-feeding and cherishing food. At the same time, in line with the concept of “combining diet and exercise”, teachers design movement games related to Huizhou cuisine, such as “Transporting Spring Bamboo Shoots” and “Hickory Nut Shelling Relay”, so that diet and physical activity work together to help children avoid the risks of overweight and obesity.

Third, the construction of “cultural” curriculum content aims to immerse children in local cultural sentiments. Cultural inheritance is the distinctive feature and soul of the Huizhou food education curriculum. The kindergarten delves deeply into the cultural connotations behind Huizhou cuisine, achieving the dual value of health education and cultural education. Huizhou has a custom of weaving egg pouches at Lixia (Start of Summer). The egg pouch is a traditional handmade item used to hold Lixia eggs. Huizhou people believe that hanging eggs at Lixia can protect children’s health and promote their growth. In the Eating Eggs at Lixia activity, teachers introduce the cultural symbolism of the egg pouch, allowing children to understand that eating eggs at the beginning of summer supplements nutrition while also perceiving the care and blessings of their elders. This subtly instills in children the Huizhou wisdom of “nourishing according to the season” and folk culture.

Implementation Pathways for the Kindergarten Food Education Curriculum Based on Huizhou Food Culture

The integration of Huizhou food culture into the kindergarten food education curriculum highlights its life-oriented, health-promoting, and cultural characteristics. Through a collaborative home-kindergarten-community pathway involving thematic kindergarten courses, family experience activities, and community practice activities, the goals of cultivating healthy eating habits and inheriting regional culture can be achieved.

Thematic Activity Courses in Kindergarten: The Basic Pathway for Healthy Eating and Cultural Enlightenment

The kindergarten curriculum is the means to achieve early childhood educational goals and the intermediary for children’s holistic development. The thematic activity course in kindergarten is the basic pathway for

integrating Huizhou food culture into food education. Based on children's age characteristics and cognitive development, and combined with the health concepts, folk customs, and localized nature of Huizhou cuisine, the kindergarten achieves a deep integration of "food education", "health", and "culture".

Implementing tiered thematic activity courses to match children's developmental levels and health needs. Children's developmental levels vary, and educational requirements differ accordingly. For younger children (K1), the focus is on "getting to know Huizhou cuisine" and developing awareness of healthy eating habits. Activities use pictures, animations, and object observations to introduce common Huizhou delicacies such as sesame cakes, wontons, and hairy tofu, helping children perceive the colors, shapes, and aromas of foods, gain a preliminary understanding of food sources and simple nutritional values, and guide them not to be picky eaters, while stimulating their interest in Huizhou's healthy cuisine. For middle children (K2), the focus is on "exploring Huizhou dietary folk customs" and practicing healthy eating habits. In conjunction with Huizhou seasonal customs, activities such as "Making Qingming Cakes", "Making Zongzi", and "Making Mooncakes" allow children to learn about the dietary customs corresponding to different solar terms through hands-on manipulation. Teachers explain the nutritional combinations of ingredients, guiding children to understand the concept that "eating seasonally is healthier", and helping them appreciate the connection among diet, folk customs, and health. For older children (K3), the focus is on "inheriting Huizhou dietary etiquette and culinary skills" and establishing healthy dietary concepts. In these activities, teachers guide children to learn Huizhou dining etiquette, such as washing hands before meals, allowing elders to eat first, and not being picky or wasteful. At the same time, children briefly experience the culinary techniques of Huizhou cuisine, such as kneading dough, wrapping wontons, and pressing sesame cake dough. Through practical experience, they gradually understand the etiquette connotations and health characteristics of Huizhou cuisine, developing good eating habits and a healthy lifestyle awareness.

Diversifying course implementation forms to strengthen firsthand experience and health guidance. Thematic activities adopt forms such as "learning by doing" and "learning through play", integrating Huizhou food culture and health concepts into various curriculum areas including language, arts, science, and health. In the language domain, teachers guide children to tell stories about Huizhou cuisine and recite nursery rhymes related to Huizhou food, incorporating healthy eating tips. In the arts domain, children draw their favorite Huizhou dishes and use colored clay to mold Huizhou snack models. In the science domain, teachers guide children to observe the growth process of Huizhou ingredients. For example, in the activity sequence "Stone Mill—Grinding Soybeans—Making Tofu", children explore the fermentation principle of hairy tofu, understanding the changes in food form brought about by "fermentation", while teachers explain in detail the nutritional value and pairing techniques of ingredients, guiding children to understand the health concept of "light diet and balanced meat-and-vegetable combinations". In the health domain, teachers combine the light, balanced, and low-salt, low-sugar characteristics of Huizhou cuisine to conduct healthy eating mini-lessons, helping children distinguish between healthy and unhealthy foods and establish healthy dietary concepts. At the same time, the kindergarten sets up a "Huizhou Food Corner" in the cafeteria, offering 1-2 Huizhou healthy dishes suitable for children each week, with strict control over salt, sugar, and oil usage. This allows children to intuitively experience the flavors and health characteristics of Huizhou cuisine in their daily meals, closely integrating curriculum content, health concepts, and life practice.

Exploring the cultural connotations of Huizhou food culture to achieve cultural enlightenment and inheritance. Huizhou cuisine contains rich cultural connotations. A food education curriculum that incorporates

cultural meaning is an important vehicle for cultural enlightenment and inheritance. Behind Huizhou cuisine lie many cultural stories, such as the Huizhou people's thrift, frugality, and neighborhood mutual assistance in dietary customs, as well as legends about the origins of Huizhou delicacies. Integrating these cultural connotations into the curriculum allows children to appreciate the essence of Huizhou culture while learning about the food. For example, in the "Making Qingming Cakes" activity, teachers focus on introducing Qingming Festival customs, helping children understand that in addition to ancestral worship, Qingming also involves the folk custom of planting willows to retain spring and the symbolic meaning of weaving willow wreaths for children to ward off evil and pray for safety. At the same time, during the implementation of activities, the kindergarten invites local Huizhou culinary inheritors and parent volunteers into the classroom to demonstrate Huizhou cooking techniques and explain dietary folk customs on site, allowing children to come into close contact with regional culture and enhance their cultural identity and pride.

Family Experience Activities: An Extended Pathway for Healthy Eating and Cultural Inheritance

The everyday scenes in family life constitute the basic context for children's learning. The family creates a favorable environment for children's learning and development and is an important extended pathway for the infiltration of food education and health concepts. Integrating Huizhou food culture into the kindergarten food education curriculum requires mobilizing family efforts to extend the food education concepts, health guidance, and cultural cognition developed in the kindergarten into family life, allowing children to develop healthy eating habits through practical family experiences.

Conducting "Huizhou Healthy Food Parent-Child Cooking" activities. The kindergarten regularly assigns parent-child practical tasks, such as making Huizhou Qingming cakes with parents, or making Huizhou wontons as a family. Parents are guided to involve their children in food preparation, choosing fresh, natural local ingredients and emphasizing the health principle of "less salt, less sugar, and fewer seasonings". During the cooking process, parents can explain to their children the selection of ingredients, cooking techniques, related Huizhou dietary customs, and the nutritional value of the ingredients—for example, that the mugwort in Qingming cakes is rich in vitamins. This deepens children's understanding of Huizhou cuisine through parent-child interaction, helps them understand the importance of healthy eating, and cultivates their hands-on abilities as well as their awareness of cooperation and communication among family members. After the activities, parents are encouraged to share photos and videos of the cooking process and results in the class group, creating a positive atmosphere of home-kindergarten interaction and inter-family interaction, collectively practicing the concept of healthy eating.

Promoting the practice of "Huizhou Family Table Etiquette". The kindergarten distributes a self-made "Huizhou Dietary Etiquette and Healthy Eating Guide" to parents, guiding them to instill Huizhou dining etiquette in their children during family meals, such as sitting properly, not making noise, taking food according to need, and cherishing food. In line with the light and balanced health characteristics of Huizhou cuisine, parents guide children to practice healthy eating habits, such as chewing slowly, eating fewer snacks, and reasonably combining meat, vegetables, and staple foods. At the same time, combined with Huizhou family dining customs, children learn about the etiquette of "elders eat first" and "actively serving rice to elders", integrating health education and etiquette education into daily dining life. Parents should also be encouraged to lead their children in trying to make simple Huizhou home-style dishes, following healthy cooking principles, so that children understand the connection between family diet, health concepts, and Huizhou food culture, thereby developing good eating habits.

Organizing “Huizhou Food Culture Parent-Child Exploration” activities. Kindergarten teachers suggest that parents use weekends and holidays to take their children to Huizhou specialty streets, farmhouses, and other locations, visiting Huizhou ingredient shops and traditional food workshops, and tasting authentic Huizhou snacks. This allows children to experience the local flavor and health characteristics of Huizhou cuisine in real-life settings. During the tasting process, parents can guide children to observe Huizhou food elements in their surroundings, such as Huizhou kitchen utensils in Huizhou restaurants or fresh vegetables in farmhouse courtyards, explain the nutritional value of different ingredients to their children, and encourage them to ask questions and actively explore. This further deepens children’s understanding of Huizhou food culture and healthy eating, achieving home-kindergarten collaboration in inheriting regional culture and cultivating healthy children.

Community Practice Activities: An Expanded Pathway for Healthy Eating and Cultural Dissemination

The community is an extension and expansion of kindergarten education and an important educational resource for kindergartens. Firsthand experience is an important pathway for children’s cognitive development and the cultivation of good behavioral habits. The Guidelines for Learning and Development of Children Aged 3-6 emphasizes meeting “children’s need to acquire experience through direct perception, practical operation, and personal experience”. The community is an important window for children to engage with society and experience life. Relying on community resources to carry out diversified practical activities, integrating Huizhou health concepts and food culture into community life, allows children to experience the charm and health value of Huizhou cuisine in broader contexts, achieving the life-orientation and socialization of food education and promoting the dual popularization of health concepts and regional culture.

Coordinating with the community to conduct “Huizhou Food Culture Promotion Week” activities with health guidance. The kindergarten collaborates with the community to organize small-scale Huizhou food culture promotion activities, inviting Huizhou food practitioners and resident volunteers from the community to participate. They demonstrate the cooking process of Huizhou sesame cakes, Huizhou pastries, hairy tofu, and other delicacies on site, and provide tasting sessions, allowing children to experience the unique flavors of Huizhou cuisine in a community setting. At the same time, the community sets up a food interactive experience zone and a healthy eating promotion area, where children can try making simple Huizhou healthy snacks on site, and participate in food knowledge quizzes, food puzzles, and other games, popularizing the health concepts of “light diet and balanced nutrition”. Children learn about Huizhou food culture in a joyful atmosphere, experiencing local cultural flavors and health benefits.

Visiting community Huizhou cultural sites for practical experience and healthy eating learning. The kindergarten also organizes children to visit community cultural sites such as the “Huizhou Garden” scenic area, where they learn about exhibits in Huizhou cultural exhibition halls, folk museums, and other venues, including traditional kitchen utensils, ingredient specimens, and dietary custom pictures. With explanations from guides, children learn about the historical origins, development, and light, balanced health characteristics of Huizhou food culture. Additionally, during visits to community farm gardens, children pick vegetables with their own hands, learning about the growing environment, harvesting techniques, and nutritional value of ingredients. They experience the transformation of food from field to table, cultivating an awareness of cherishing food and respecting labor. This process also deepens children’s understanding of healthy eating and helps them appreciate the local and healthful nature of Huizhou cuisine.

Conducting “Little Huizhou Food Culture Promoters” activities to spread health concepts.

Kindergarten teachers select children through self-nomination and voting to serve as “little promoters” who enter the community to promote Huizhou food culture. Children share what they have learned in kindergarten—knowledge of Huizhou cuisine, cooking techniques, dietary etiquette, and healthy eating concepts—with community residents. For example, they introduce Huizhou healthy dishes to neighbors, explain the nutritional value of ingredients, popularize healthy eating tips, and display Huizhou snacks they have made. Through this approach, children not only reinforce their memory and understanding of Huizhou food culture and health concepts but also promote the dissemination of Huizhou food culture and health concepts in the community, while developing their language expression skills and sense of social responsibility, achieving the dual purposes of promoting healthy eating and inheriting local culture.

Conclusion

Integrating Huizhou food culture into the kindergarten food education curriculum is not simply a “gourmet experience” but rather an organic combination of cultivating healthy eating habits and inheriting regional culture. It allows children to internalize health concepts and develop healthy eating habits through perception, experience, and practice, while also coming to know Huizhou food culture and building cultural confidence.

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