



Integración de la cultura alimentaria en el aprendizaje del idioma inglés como estrategia educativa interdisciplinaria

Integration of Food Culture in English Language Teaching as an Interdisciplinary Educational Strategy

Integração da cultura alimentar no ensino da língua inglesa como estratégia educativa interdisciplinar

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Resumen

La integración de la cultura gastronómica en la enseñanza del inglés como segunda lengua (ESL) presenta una innovadora estrategia interdisciplinaria que promueve la adquisición del idioma, la comprensión cultural y una mayor participación. Esta revisión narrativa explora la literatura relevante para identificar los beneficios educativos, los marcos teóricos, los enfoques prácticos, los resultados, los desafíos y las recomendaciones asociados con la incorporación de temas culinarios en las aulas de ESL. Utilizando bases de datos académicas como SciELO, Redalyc, Elsevier, ERIC y Google Scholar, este estudio sintetiza el conocimiento actual mediante una revisión bibliográfica exhaustiva y no sistemática. Los resultados destacan mejoras en la competencia lingüística, la empatía cultural y las habilidades interdisciplinarias de los estudiantes. También se señalan desafíos como la integración curricular, la disponibilidad de recursos y el apoyo institucional. Las recomendaciones enfatizan la planificación estructurada, la colaboración interdisciplinaria y el desarrollo profesional específico.

Palabras Clave: Enseñanza del inglés; cultura gastronómica; educación interdisciplinaria; ESL; integración cultural; estrategias pedagógicas.

Abstract

The integration of food culture in teaching English as a second language (ESL) presents an innovative interdisciplinary strategy that promotes language acquisition, cultural understanding, and enhanced engagement. This narrative review explores relevant literature to identify the educational benefits, theoretical frameworks, practical approaches, outcomes, challenges, and recommendations associated with incorporating culinary themes within ESL classrooms. Utilizing academic databases including SciELO, Redalyc, Elsevier, ERIC, and Google Scholar, this study synthesizes current knowledge through a comprehensive non-systematic literature review. Results highlight improvements in students' linguistic proficiency, cultural empathy, and interdisciplinary skills. Challenges such as curricular integration, resource availability, and institutional support are also noted. Recommendations emphasize structured planning, interdisciplinary collaboration, and targeted professional development.

Keywords: English language teaching; food culture; interdisciplinary education; ESL; cultural integration; pedagogical strategies.

Resumo

A integração da cultura alimentar no ensino do inglês como segunda língua (ESL) apresenta uma estratégia interdisciplinar inovadora que promove a aquisição da língua, a compreensão cultural e o envolvimento melhorado. Esta revisão narrativa explora a literatura relevante para identificar os benefícios educacionais, os referenciais teóricos, as abordagens práticas, os resultados, os desafios e as recomendações associados à incorporação de temas culinários nas salas de aula de ESL. Utilizando bases de dados académicas como a SciELO, Redalyc, Elsevier, ERIC e Google Scholar, este estudo sintetiza o conhecimento atual através de uma revisão bibliográfica abrangente e não sistemática. Os resultados destacam melhorias na proficiência linguística, na empatia cultural e nas competências interdisciplinares dos alunos. Desafios como a integração curricular, a disponibilidade de recursos e o apoio institucional são também observados. As recomendações enfatizam o planejamento estruturado, a colaboração interdisciplinar e o desenvolvimento profissional direcionado.

Palavras-chave: Ensino de inglês; cultura alimentar; educação interdisciplinar; ESL; integração cultural; estratégias pedagógicas.

Introduction

In today's globalized and multicultural societies, English Language Teaching (ELT) has evolved beyond the structural confines of grammar and vocabulary to include elements that enrich learners' communicative competence through authentic and contextualized experiences. One of the most compelling approaches within interdisciplinary pedagogy is the integration of food culture into English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction. This methodology not only enhances linguistic proficiency but also cultivates cultural empathy and critical thinking skills, essential for 21st-century learners [1][2].

Interdisciplinary strategies are increasingly prioritized in modern curricula due to their potential to foster meaningful and lasting learning by connecting academic content with students' real-life experiences [1][7]. Food, as a ubiquitous and culturally rich theme, offers fertile ground for such connections. In the ESL context, food culture provides a tangible and engaging platform to practice language skills while simultaneously exploring cultural identities, values, and traditions. This

aligns with the principles outlined in the CEFR, which promote intercultural awareness and real-world language use as core communicative competencies [3].

Moreover, the inclusion of food-related themes in the ESL classroom aligns with Krashen's affective filter hypothesis, which posits that learners acquire language more effectively in low-anxiety environments [4]. Culinary themes create a relaxed, interactive, and multisensory learning atmosphere that encourages participation and risk-taking. Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory further supports this approach by emphasizing the role of social interaction and cultural mediation in cognitive development [5]. Culinary discussions and collaborative cooking projects become vehicles for negotiation of meaning and co-construction of knowledge.

This review seeks to explore how food culture, when strategically incorporated into ESL instruction, fosters not only linguistic development but also global competencies such as empathy, intercultural communication, and teamwork. Drawing from peer-reviewed literature indexed in SciELO, Redalyc, Elsevier, ERIC, and Google Scholar, this study synthesizes recent findings on the theoretical foundations, pedagogical practices, learning outcomes, and implementation challenges associated with food-themed ESL instruction. The ultimate aim is to provide educators and curriculum designers with practical insights and evidence-based recommendations for enriching language education through culinary culture..

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical underpinnings of integrating food culture into ESL classrooms draw from multiple intersecting domains of educational research: language acquisition, sociocultural learning, interdisciplinary education, and cultural studies.

Krashen's Input Hypothesis remains central to second language acquisition theory. According to Krashen, learners acquire language when they are exposed to "comprehensible input" slightly above their current proficiency level ($i+1$) in meaningful contexts [4]. Food-related materials such as recipes, menus, documentaries, and cooking demonstrations provide accessible and culturally relevant content that facilitates language learning. These materials serve as authentic input, which

according to García & López [9], is crucial for maintaining motivation and ensuring real-world applicability of language skills.

Sociocultural Theory, developed by Vygotsky [5], highlights the importance of cultural context and social interaction in the learning process. Within the culinary context, students collaborate in cooking activities, exchange cultural knowledge, and engage in discussion, all of which promote language learning through social mediation. Liu [6] adds that cultural integration enhances learners' ability to decode not only linguistic signs but also the social and cultural meanings embedded in language.

Situated Learning Theory by Lave and Wenger supports the view that learning is most effective when situated within meaningful and culturally relevant activities [7]. Food-related tasks simulate authentic environments such as markets, restaurants, or family kitchens, providing learners with a functional space to apply language skills in real-life scenarios. This kind of experiential learning also aligns with Tanaka's work on the effectiveness of food culture in improving retention and cultural literacy [8].

Interdisciplinary Education Theory asserts that bridging multiple subject areas fosters deeper learning, critical thinking, and practical knowledge transfer [1][7]. As food culture encompasses elements of geography, history, health, and social science, its integration into language teaching naturally leads to cross-disciplinary connections. Johnson [7] argues that such approaches not only enhance subject matter retention but also equip students with broader cognitive and interpersonal skills.

Together, these frameworks justify the educational value of culinary themes in ESL. The theories collectively affirm that language is not a decontextualized set of rules but a socially situated practice deeply embedded in culture. Therefore, incorporating food culture enriches both the linguistic and intercultural dimensions of ESL instruction.

Methodology

This narrative review employs a non-systematic literature search strategy, examining peer-reviewed articles published between 2019 and 2024. Databases searched include SciELO, Redalyc, Elsevier, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Keywords utilized were “food culture,” “ESL,” “interdisciplinary education,” “language teaching,” and “cultural integration.” Inclusion criteria encompassed full-text availability, peer-reviewed status, direct relevance to ESL instructional practices, and recent publications within the defined timeframe. Exclusion criteria involved non-peer-reviewed articles, outdated literature, and unrelated thematic content.

Educational Benefits

Integrating culinary themes within ESL instruction demonstrates multiple educational benefits. Primarily, authentic contexts significantly enhance student motivation and engagement, crucial components of successful language acquisition [10]. Students exposed to culinary-themed lessons exhibit improved vocabulary retention, enhanced grammatical accuracy, and increased conversational fluency [11]. The multisensory experiences associated with food preparation and tasting embed linguistic structures deeply within learners’ cognitive frameworks. Additionally, incorporating cultural themes allows learners to explore global and local identities, fostering a deeper appreciation of diversity, empathy, and cultural awareness [12]. Culinary activities create a shared experiential environment that enhances intercultural communication skills, essential for effective global citizenship [13].

Practical Approaches

Several effective pedagogical strategies include interactive cooking classes, recipe writing workshops, culinary cultural events, and interdisciplinary project-based learning (PBL), integrating language with subjects like history, geography, health, and nutrition [14,15]. Structured curriculum mapping helps define clear linguistic objectives, cultural outcomes, and interdisciplinary goals, promoting effective collaboration among educators from diverse disciplines [16].

Table 1. Effective Methods for Integrating Food Culture in ESL

Method	Description	Educational Outcome	Reference
Interactive Cooking Classes	Hands-on cooking activities with English instructions	Enhanced vocabulary, listening skills, practical language use	Lee & Chen [17]
Culinary Cultural Events	Events highlighting foods from English-speaking countries	Increased cultural knowledge and conversational skills	Patel & Stevens [18]
Recipe Writing Workshops	Creation and sharing of recipes in English narrative texts	Improved writing, vocabulary, grammatical accuracy	Gomez & Rivera [19]

Results:

The results of the narrative review point toward substantial educational gains resulting from the integration of food culture into ESL classrooms. These include improvements in vocabulary acquisition, grammatical accuracy, writing fluency, oral communication skills, and intercultural understanding.

Studies such as those by Chen [21] and Hernández [10] demonstrate that food-related activities significantly boost vocabulary retention and recall. Learners exposed to culinary scenarios—such as describing recipes, identifying ingredients, or recounting cooking processes—acquire and use a broader range of thematic vocabulary. Furthermore, the contextual nature of these tasks supports grammar internalization. For instance, students naturally practice imperative structures (“Add the flour,” “Stir gently”) and sequence connectors (“First, chop the onions... then fry them”) in recipe-based assignments [19][21].

In writing skills, Gomez & Rivera [19] observed notable gains when students participated in recipe writing workshops. Learners improved their descriptive language, narrative organization, and syntactic range. This was attributed to the personal and familiar nature of food-related content, which fostered greater motivation and engagement.

In oral communication, interactive cooking classes—as documented by Lee & Chen [17]—enhanced students’ listening comprehension and speaking fluency. Activities like giving and following cooking instructions simulated real-life dialogues and encouraged peer collaboration. This led to increased learner confidence and spontaneous use of English in social contexts.

On the cultural dimension, food-based pedagogy contributed to heightened cultural sensitivity and empathy. According to Kim & Park [11], discussing and preparing traditional dishes from different cultures promoted mutual respect and understanding among learners from diverse backgrounds. Patel & Stevens [18] similarly reported that culinary events celebrating international cuisines fostered rich intercultural exchanges and broadened students’ global perspectives.

Student engagement also emerged as a key outcome. Fernandez & Morales [22] linked experiential learning through food with higher motivation levels, especially among students who might struggle in traditional academic settings. The multisensory appeal of cooking—sight, smell, taste, and touch—enhanced memory and emotional connection to the learning content, creating a more inclusive and stimulating classroom environment.

Nevertheless, several challenges were noted. Davis [23] and Turner [24] highlight barriers such as rigid curricula, lack of resources, and insufficient institutional support. Teachers reported limited time to plan interdisciplinary lessons and a lack of appropriate spaces for culinary activities. These constraints underscore the need for administrative backing and professional development opportunities, as emphasized by Carter [26] and Robinson [20].

In sum, the literature reveals that food-themed ESL instruction leads to measurable improvements in linguistic and cultural competencies while simultaneously enhancing student engagement and interdisciplinary awareness. However, successful implementation depends on thoughtful curricular planning, adequate infrastructure, and institutional collaboration.

Table 2. Identified Challenges and Recommendations

Challenge	Description	Recommendation	Reference
Curricular Constraints	Difficulty integrating interdisciplinary content	Structured curricular planning, professional development	Davis [25]
Resource Availability	Lack of adequate resources for culinary activities	Secure institutional support, external partnerships	Turner [26]

Discussion

Integrating food culture into ESL classrooms aligns language learning with broader educational goals such as cultural understanding, empathy development, and interdisciplinary skills enhancement [27]. Addressing identified challenges demands strategic planning, institutional support, targeted teacher training, and strong collaboration among ESL instructors and interdisciplinary specialists [28].

Conclusion

Incorporating food culture in ESL education presents considerable linguistic, cultural, and interdisciplinary benefits despite notable implementation challenges. Strategic planning, targeted professional development, and robust institutional support are critical for successful integration. Future research should further investigate long-term impacts, explore detailed pedagogical frameworks, and strengthen interdisciplinary collaboration.

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