

Let Me Cook or Let Me Teach?: Nurturing the Future of Culinary Education

JEA D. ADLAON¹, KATRIN AIRA C. PELINGON², EVANGELINE V. SANCHEZ³

¹*Department of Hospitality Management, College of Management and Entrepreneurship,*

^{2,3}*Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City Philippines*

Abstract- *This phenomenological study investigates the lived experiences of six chef-educators employed in private and state universities in the Philippines, exploring the tensions, transformations, and triumphs inherent in navigating dual professional identities as both industry practitioners and academic instructors. Anchored on Dewey's (1938) Experiential Learning Theory and Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and employing NVivo 14-assisted qualitative data analysis, the study surfaced three overarching themes: (1) Negotiating the Dual Role, (2) The Pedagogical Transformation from Kitchen to Classroom, and (3) The Sustainability of Passion under Academic Demands. Findings reveal that chef-educators experience significant role strain arising from the structural incompatibility between culinary industry norms and higher education culture, yet demonstrate resilience sustained by intrinsic motivation, community of practice, and a deeply-held commitment to culinary heritage transmission. The study argues that the perceived binary between cooking competence and teaching excellence constitutes a false dichotomy, and that culinary education's long-term viability depends upon deliberate policy and institutional frameworks that simultaneously cultivate both dimensions. Practical recommendations are offered for curriculum designers, academic administrators, and industry stakeholders seeking to strengthen the pipeline of qualified, pedagogically competent culinary educators in emerging hospitality economies.*

Keywords: *Culinary Education, Chef-Educators, Experiential Learning, Self-Determination Theory, Nvivo, Phenomenology, Higher Education, Philippines*

I. INTRODUCTION

Industry Context and Rationale

The global culinary education sector has undergone profound structural change in the past two decades, driven by the rapid expansion of the hospitality and food service industry, evolving consumer tastes, and the commodification of culinary culture through

digital media (Murray, 2023; Robinson & Beesley, 2010). The World Travel and Tourism Council (2023) projects that the hospitality sector will contribute over USD 9.5 trillion to global GDP by 2033, intensifying demand for formally trained culinary professionals. In the Philippines, the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) and the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) have jointly identified Hospitality and Tourism Management as a priority program, yet persistent gaps remain in the caliber and pedagogical preparation of culinary faculty (CHED Memorandum Order No. 62, s. 2017).

Despite the expansion of culinary degree programs at the tertiary level, the academic literature reveals a troubling under representation of chef-educators' perspectives, particularly those who maintain active professional engagement in commercial kitchens while discharging teaching obligations (Robinson & Beesley, 2010). This dual-role phenomenon is especially pronounced in developing hospitality economies where industry practitioners are recruited into academe without structured pedagogical induction (Murray, 2023). The resulting tension—between the embodied, tacit knowledge of professional kitchen culture and the formalized, discursive demands of higher education—constitutes the central problem this study addresses.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Dewey's Experiential Learning Theory (1938)

John Dewey's foundational work *Experience and Education* (1938) provides the primary epistemological lens for this inquiry. Dewey posited that genuine education arises from the continuous reconstruction of experience—a cyclical process involving concrete action, critical reflection, and the

formation of abstract principles that guide future practice. Applied to culinary education, this framework illuminates how chef-educators occupy a uniquely privileged epistemic position: their professional kitchen work constitutes a rich repository of experiential knowledge, yet the transmission of this knowledge within formal academic structures requires the deliberate cultivation of reflective and analytical pedagogical competencies (Kolb, 1984, as theorized through Dewey's framework). The disjuncture between doing and teaching thus becomes the central pedagogical challenge that Dewey's theory helps to articulate.

Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000)

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) provides the motivational architecture for understanding why chef-educators sustain—or abandon—their dual professional commitments. SDT posits that human flourishing and sustained engagement are contingent upon the satisfaction of three universal psychological needs: autonomy (the sense of volitional control over one's actions), competence (the experience of effectiveness and mastery), and relatedness (the sense of belonging and meaningful connection with others) (Deci & Ryan, 2000; Ryan & Deci, 2000). In the context of culinary academe, these needs manifest in distinctive ways: autonomy is tested by institutional regulations and standardized curricula that constrain creative kitchen pedagogy; competence is challenged by the expectation that accomplished chefs will naturally excel as educators without formal pedagogical preparation; and relatedness is mediated by the degree to which chef-educators feel accepted and valued within both culinary industry networks and academic communities of practice.

The integration of SDT with Dewey's experiential learning theory creates a theoretically robust framework for interpreting the motivational dynamics of chef-educators, particularly their capacity to sustain passion across dual professional domains under conditions of structural ambiguity and institutional demand (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

Statement of the Problem

This study sought to answer the following guiding questions: (1) How do culinary educators who maintain active industry engagement experience the tension between professional kitchen identity and academic faculty identity? (2) What pedagogical transformations occur as culinary professionals transition into higher education teaching roles? (3) What factors sustain or undermine the intrinsic motivation and professional passion of chef-educators over time? These questions were pursued through a phenomenological lens to honor the primacy of lived experience as the unit of analysis.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a descriptive phenomenological research design, consistent with the Husserlian tradition of returning to the 'things themselves' in order to derive essential structures of experience from first-person accounts (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenology is particularly appropriate for this inquiry because it privileges the subjective meaning-making of participants over causal or predictive explanations, thereby enabling an empathetic and textured account of the chef-educator experience that quantitative approaches cannot capture (Creswell, 2014). The methodology aligns with the study's ontological commitment to the inter subjective construction of professional identity.

Participants and Sampling

Purposive sampling was employed to recruit six (6) chef-educators currently holding faculty positions in private and state universities in the Philippines who simultaneously maintain active professional engagement in the culinary industry, whether through consultancy, competition judging, private catering operations, or staged kitchen employment. Participants included four males and two females, with industry experience ranging from eight to twenty-two years, and teaching tenures spanning two to fourteen years. All participants held at minimum a National Certificate Level II (NCII) from TESDA and a bachelor's degree in Hospitality Management or a related field; two held master's degrees. Institutional affiliations encompassed universities in Metro Manila,

Western Visayas, and Davao Region, ensuring geographic diversity across the Philippine archipelago.

Data Collection

Data were collected through two complementary instruments: (1) in-depth semi-structured individual interviews conducted over 60–90 minutes per participant, and (2) a single focus group discussion (FGD) of 120 minutes involving all six participants. All sessions were audio-recorded and professionally transcribed verbatim, with code-switching between Filipino and English preserved to maintain authenticity of expression. Ethical clearance was obtained from the institutional review board, and formal written informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection (Creswell, 2014). Interviews were conducted during the middle term of Academic Year 2024–2025.

NVivo-Assisted Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was conducted using NVivo 14 (Lumivero, 2023), a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS) platform that facilitates systematic coding, theme development, and rigorous audit trails. The adoption of NVivo represents a significant methodological advancement over manual coding, enabling greater transparency, replicability, and depth in the analytical process (Bazeley & Jackson, 2013). The analysis proceeded through the following iterative phases, consistent with Creswell and Poth's (2018) phenomenological data analysis protocol:

Phase 1 — Data Organization and Import: All interview transcripts and FGD verbatim records were imported into NVivo 14 as individual case nodes, preserving participant anonymity through coded

identifiers (Chef 1 through Chef 6). Demographic attributes (years in industry, teaching tenure, degree level, institutional type) were assigned as case classifications to enable matrix coding queries.

Phase 2 — Open Coding (Initial Coding): A line-by-line open coding process was applied to all transcripts, generating 187 initial codes from the dataset. NVivo's Coding Stripe and Word Frequency Query tools were deployed to identify recurring lexical patterns and co-occurring concepts, providing an empirical basis for code consolidation.

Phase 3 — Axial Coding and Category Development: Related open codes were clustered into 14 sub-categories through axial coding, examining relationships between categories with reference to the theoretical framework. NVivo's Relationship Nodes and Concept Maps were utilized to visualize inter-category connections and test emerging theoretical propositions.

Phase 4 — Selective Coding and Theme Identification: Three overarching themes were identified through selective coding, representing the central organizing constructs of the phenomenological analysis. NVivo's Matrix Coding Query was used to cross-tabulate themes by participant characteristics, revealing variation in experiential patterns across institutional types and career stages.

Phase 5 — Member Checking and Negative Case Analysis: Preliminary findings were returned to participants for member checking, a key validity strategy in qualitative research (Creswell & Poth, 2018). NVivo's Search functionality assisted in identifying negative cases—instances where participant experiences diverged from emerging patterns—thereby strengthening the credibility of the analysis.

Table 1. NVivo 14 Coding Summary

Theme	NVivo Node	References (n)	Key Codes / Sub-nodes
Negotiating the Dual Role	\Chef Identity\Role Conflict	62	Identity strain; credibility anxiety; role switching; industry vs. academe
Pedagogical Transformation: Kitchen to Classroom	\Pedagogy\Curriculum Adaptation	71	Syllabus construction; assessment design; knowledge codification; andragogy

Sustainability of Passion under Academic Demands	\Motivation\Burnout Risk\Resilience	54	Intrinsic motivation; burnout triggers; legacy consciousness; mentoring ethos
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Note. Total references = 187 across 6 case nodes; data sourced from NVivo 14 Query Output (2025).

IV. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Three overarching themes emerged from the NVivo-assisted phenomenological analysis of participant narratives. Each theme is presented with supporting verbatim evidence, followed by theoretical integration with the Experiential Learning Theory (Dewey, 1938) and Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2000), as well as connections to relevant empirical literature and industry practice.

Theme 1: Negotiating the Dual Role [NVivo Node: \Chef Identity\Role Conflict | n = 62 references]

The most pervasive experiential structure to emerge from the data set was the persistent tension between participants' identities as kitchen professionals and their emergent identities as academic educators. NVivo's Matrix Coding Query revealed that all six participants articulated instances of what sociologists term role conflict (Goode, 1960)—the strain that arises when the behavioral expectations attached to one role are incompatible with those of another. Within the culinary context, this conflict is particularly acute because kitchen culture vaporizes embodied expertise, hierarchy, and performance under pressure, while academic culture demands reflective inquiry, collegiality governance, and formalized knowledge production (Robinson & Beesley, 2010).

Participants described experiencing what NVivo's word frequency analysis identified as the most salient lexical cluster in the data set: credibility. Chef-educators feared that prolonged absence from professional kitchens would erode their standing among peers and students alike, yet immersion in academic demands left insufficient time for sustained industry engagement.

"Its hard to maintain both identity as a chef and a teacher kse wala akong formal (I don't have formal training as a teacher) training as teacher." — Chef 1 [NVivo Ref: \Chef Identity\Role Conflict\Credibility Anxiety, Coded Segment 1.04]

This declaration encapsulates the credential gap that characterizes the Philippine culinary education context, where industry practitioners are recruited into faculty positions without mandatory pedagogical preparation. The participant's code-switching from English to Filipino ("kse" = "kasi" = "because") is itself analytically significant: it signals the moments where professional vulnerability transcends formal academic register, a phenomenon Creswell and Poth (2018) describe as affective transparency in phenomenological data.

From the perspective of Self-Determination Theory, this role conflict directly threatens the need for competence—one of the three fundamental psychological needs theorized by Deci and Ryan (1985, 2000). When chef-educators perceive themselves as inadequate in either domain, the resulting sense of incompetence erodes intrinsic motivation and increases the risk of professional disengagement. The NVivo Matrix Coding Query further revealed that participants with shorter teaching tenures (two to four years) exhibited a higher density of credibility-anxiety codes, suggesting that the identity negotiation process is most intense in early academic career stages and may attenuate with experience—a finding consistent with developmental stage models of professional socialization (Super, 1980, as discussed in Robinson & Beesley, 2010).

Industry implications of this theme are substantial. Institutional human resource policies that fail to provide structured induction programs for chef-educators inadvertently amplify role conflict by leaving practitioners to self-navigate an alien professional culture. The absence of formal mentorship structures, teaching certification pathways, and graduated workload expectations for newly appointed culinary faculty represents a systemic gap that industry and academic leadership must jointly address (Murray, 2023).

Theme 2: The Pedagogical Transformation from Kitchen to Classroom [NVivo Node: \Pedagogy\Curriculum Adaptation | n = 71 references]
The second and most richly coded theme—generating 71 NVivo references across 14 coded sub-nodes—documents the profound cognitive and professional re-orientation that chef-educators undergo as they translate tacit kitchen knowledge into formalized pedagogical artifacts. NVivo's Concept Map tool revealed a dense network of associations between sub-nodes including syllabus construction, competency identification, assessment design, and andragogical methodology, suggesting that pedagogical transformation is experienced not as a singular event but as an ongoing, multi-dimensional process.

The shift from apprenticeship-style knowledge transmission—characterized by demonstration, imitation, and sensory feedback—to formal academic instruction requires chef-educators to make explicit what Polanyi (1966) famously described as tacit knowledge: the embodied, pre-reflective understanding that professional cooks possess but rarely articulate in linguistic form. This knowledge codification process is intellectually demanding and professionally unfamiliar, generating significant cognitive load for practitioners whose formation occurred predominantly through experiential rather than discursive means.

"Ito ang madugo, yung paggawa ng syllabus at training plan with all the identified competencies. As a chef I'm not used to write lengthy paper works. But I need to do it—it's a part of the teaching and learning process of a budding chef." — Chef 3 [NVivo Ref: \Pedagogy\Curriculum Adaptation\Syllabus Construction, Coded Segment 3.09]

The Filipino colloquialism "madugo" (literally "bloody"; figuratively "laborious" or "painstaking") is particularly evocative: it appropriates the visceral, embodied language of kitchen culture to describe an intellectual academic task, revealing the degree to which chef-educators interpret pedagogical work through a culinary experiential lens. This linguistic phenomenon—observable across multiple participants in the NVivo dataset—supports Dewey's (1938) contention that prior experience shapes the

frameworks through which new experiences are interpreted and integrated.

Applied to culinary education, Dewey's (1938) experiential learning framework demands that effective chef-educators do not merely reproduce kitchen demonstrations within classroom settings but develop the capacity to facilitate reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation—the full cycle of what Kolb (1984) later formalized as the Experiential Learning Cycle. NVivo's Relationship Node analysis revealed that participants who had engaged in formal continuing professional development in education—such as Graduate Diploma in Teaching or Faculty Development Program participants—produced richer and more pedagogically sophisticated descriptions of their curriculum design processes, suggesting that deliberate educational preparation meaningfully amplifies the quality of pedagogical transformation.

From an industry perspective, this theme underscores the structural discontinuity between professional kitchen formation and academic faculty development. The culinary industry's traditional reliance on informal knowledge transmission through mentorship, observation, and repetition (Robinson & Beesley, 2010) leaves practitioners poorly equipped for the documentation-intensive, outcome-based curriculum frameworks mandated by CHED's policies on Outcomes-Based Education (OBE) (CHED Memorandum Order No. 46, s. 2012). Bridging this structural gap requires industry associations, academic institutions, and regulatory bodies to collaboratively design transitional competency frameworks for aspiring chef-educators.

Theme 3: The Sustainability of Passion under Academic Demands [NVivo Node: \Motivation\Burnout Risk\Resilience | n = 54 references]

The third theme addresses the phenomenological experience of sustaining professional passion across the compounding demands of academic life. NVivo's Coding Query identified a recurring dialectic within participant narratives between burnout risk—precipitated by administrative overload, research requirements, accreditation demands, and community

extension obligations—and resilience anchored in intrinsic motivation, legacy consciousness, and relational bonds with students and the broader culinary community.

This finding resonates profoundly with Self-Determination Theory's account of the conditions under which intrinsic motivation is sustained or undermined. Deci and Ryan (2000) propose that when environmental conditions systematically frustrate autonomy, competence, or relatedness needs, intrinsic motivation deteriorates into amotivation or extrinsic compliance—psychological states associated with burnout, emotional exhaustion, and eventual attrition. In the chef-educator context, the academic environment's extensive non-teaching demands represent a direct threat to the autonomy need: practitioners who entered academe motivated by the desire to teach culinary arts find their time and energy progressively colonized by activities perceived as peripheral to their core professional purpose.

"There are bleak days that I have to ask myself, shucks! Why am I teaching? Do I need to do this pa? Why just be the best chef in town? But deep inside I know the answer—that my love for cooking should be shared to the next batch of chefs, so that sustainability of culinary education should be there." — Chef 5 [NVivo Ref: \Motivation\Burnout Risk\Resilience\Legacy Consciousness, Coded Segment 5.11]

This testimony is analytically remarkable for its dialectical structure: the participant moves from affective crisis ("bleak days"; "shucks!") through interrogation ("Why am I teaching?") to self-determined resolution ("my love for cooking should be shared"), enacting in real time the motivational dynamics that SDT theorizes. The concept of "sustainability of culinary education"—articulated unprompted by a practitioner without formal grounding in educational theory—resonates with the theoretical construct of relatedness: the participant's motivation is sustained not by individual gratification alone but by a sense of responsibility to a larger community of practice and a future generation of culinary professionals.

NVivo's Negative Case Analysis identified one divergent pattern within this theme: participants employed in private institutions with higher faculty remuneration and more flexible workload allocations reported significantly lower burnout risk than their counterparts in state universities, where resource constraints compound administrative demands. This finding has direct policy implications for government-operated higher education institutions seeking to retain qualified culinary faculty: competitive compensation structures and workload rationalization are not merely administrative conveniences but psychologically necessary conditions for intrinsic motivation maintenance, as SDT would predict (Ryan & Deci, 2000).

From an industry standpoint, this theme highlights the critical importance of institutional cultures that recognize and celebrate the dual expertise of chef-educators, rather than treating industry experience as merely incidental to academic function. Professional recognition mechanisms—such as formal acknowledgment of industry consultancy as part of faculty load, inclusion of culinary competition achievements in promotion criteria, and structured industry immersion sabbaticals—would operationalize SDT's relatedness and competence needs within institutional policy (Murray, 2023; Robinson & Beesley, 2010).

V. DISCUSSION

Synthesis: Dismantling the False Dichotomy
The aggregate findings of this phenomenological inquiry, triangulated through NVivo-assisted thematic analysis and grounded in Dewey's (1938) Experiential Learning Theory and Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) Self-Determination Theory, collectively challenge the binary opposition that organizes the study's titular question: "Let me cook or let me teach?" Both the theoretical framework and the empirical evidence converge on a more nuanced proposition—that exemplary culinary education demands the simultaneous cultivation of kitchen mastery and pedagogical competence, operating in dynamic, mutually reinforcing interplay rather than as competing priorities.

Dewey's (1938) insistence on the continuity of experience as the foundation of genuine education implies that chef-educators' ongoing kitchen practice is not a distraction from their teaching function but its essential condition: without continuous immersion in the evolving culinary industry, their experiential knowledge base becomes static, their industry credibility erodes, and their capacity to facilitate authentic experiential learning for students diminishes. Conversely, without deliberate development of pedagogical competencies, chef-educators cannot fulfill the fundamental academic mission of transforming experience into systematic, transferable knowledge—the very process that distinguishes professional education from informal apprenticeship.

This synthesis is consistent with emerging industry discourse on the T-shaped professional (Brown & Duguid, 2000, as applied in Murray, 2023): an educator whose competence profile is characterized by deep vertical expertise in culinary arts (the stem of the T) and broad horizontal competencies in pedagogy, curriculum design, student assessment, research, and community engagement (the cross-bar of the T). The institutional challenge is to create enabling conditions under which the T-shape can be authentically developed and sustained rather than forcing chef-educators to artificially choose one dimension over the other.

Industry Implications

The findings carry substantive implications for the Philippine culinary industry and its relationship with higher education. As the hospitality sector continues

to expand—with WTTC (2023) projecting Southeast Asian hospitality employment to reach 60 million by 2033—the quality of culinary graduates will increasingly determine industry competitiveness. This places a premium on the effectiveness of chef-educators, whose dual-role competencies directly translate into graduate readiness for industry employment.

Industry associations such as the Culinary Federation of the Philippines and the Hotel and Restaurant Association of the Philippines should consider establishing formal pathways for industry-to-academe transition, analogous to the Clinical Educator models employed in health professions education. Such frameworks might include mentored teaching internships, co-teaching arrangements with experienced faculty, and structured pedagogical development modules delivered in partnership with higher education institutions (Murray, 2023). The establishment of formally recognized Professional Teaching Qualifications for culinary practitioners would constitute a significant step toward legitimizing the dual expertise that chef-educators are already practicing informally.

VI. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the phenomenological analysis and theoretical synthesis, the following evidence-based recommendations are advanced for academic administrators, industry stakeholders, curriculum developers, and policymakers:

Table 2. Evidence-Based Recommendations Matrix

Stakeholder	Recommendation	Theoretical Basis	NVivo Theme
Academic Institutions	Mandate structured pedagogical induction programs (minimum 120 hours) for all newly appointed chef-educators, encompassing learning theory, OBE curriculum design, assessment methodology, and classroom management.	SDT – Competence Need (Deci & Ryan, 2000)	Theme 1 & 2
Academic Institutions	Formally recognize active industry engagement (consultancy, competition, staged kitchen work) as part of the faculty workload and tenure/promotion criteria.	Dewey (1938) – Continuity of Experience	Theme 1 & 3

Academic Institutions / CHED	Establish dedicated Industry Immersion Sabbatical provisions for culinary faculty, enabling sustained professional kitchen engagement every three to five years.	Experiential Learning Theory; Robinson & Beesley (2010)	Theme 2
Industry Associations	Develop formal “Clinical Chef-Educator” pathways in collaboration with HEIs, modeled on health professions education frameworks, providing mentored transition support for industry-to-academe movers.	SDT – Relatedness Need; Murray (2023)	Theme 1
Policymakers (CHED/TESDA)	Review and revise Hiring and Promotion Standards for culinary faculty to explicitly value dual competencies— kitchen expertise and pedagogical qualification— moving beyond credential checklists to assessed teaching effectiveness.	Creswell & Poth (2018); Murray (2023)	All Themes
Individual Chef-Educators	Cultivate deliberate reflective practice through teaching portfolios, peer observation cycles, and participation in culinary education professional learning communities.	Dewey (1938) – Reflective Observation	Theme 2 & 3

Note. OBE = Outcomes-Based Education; HEI = Higher Education Institution; SDT = Self-Determination Theory.

VII. CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study, employing NVivo 14-assisted analysis of six chef-educator narratives in the Philippine higher education context, has produced three theoretically and empirically grounded insights into the lived experience of culinary professionals who navigate the dual demands of kitchen practice and academic teaching. The findings confirm that role conflict, pedagogical transformation, and motivational sustainability represent the defining experiential structures of the chef-educator identity, and that these structures are best understood through the integrative theoretical lens of Dewey's (1938) Experiential Learning Theory and Deci and Ryan's (1985, 2000) Self-Determination Theory.

The study's central argument—that the binary between cooking competence and teaching excellence is a false and counterproductive dichotomy—has profound implications for how culinary education is conceived, resourced, and governed. The future of culinary education in the Philippines, and in analogous emerging hospitality economies across Southeast Asia, depends upon the deliberate construction of institutional environments in which chef-educators are equipped, valued, and supported to be both outstanding kitchen professionals and accomplished academic educators. Achieving this vision requires coordinated action across academic institutions,

industry associations, professional regulatory bodies, and individual practitioners.

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