

Exploring Innovative Horizon: A Collaborative Journey on Authentic Food Conceptualization Among Hospitality Educators and Students

Jeza F. Terado; Jude Anthony L. Gatela

Leyte Normal University, Tacloban City, Philippines

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100600261>

Received: 06 June 2026; Accepted: 11 June 2026; Published: 22 June 2026

ABSTRACT

This study explores the innovative horizon of authentic food conceptualization through a collaborative journey involving hospitality educators and students. As the culinary landscape evolves, the need for educational frameworks that embrace authentic food practices has become paramount. This research aims to identify effective strategies for fostering collaboration between educators and students in the hospitality sector to develop a deeper understanding of authentic food concepts. Employing a qualitative methodology, the study gathers insights from focus group discussions from the educators and students of College of Management and Entrepreneurship from Leyte Normal University. Key themes emerge including Authenticity and Quality of Ingredients, Barriers in Food Conceptualization and Guidance and Recommendations from Experts. The findings highlight the benefits of collaborative projects that encourage creativity and critical thinking, enabling students to engage with food concepts in a meaningful way. Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of mentorship from educators in guiding students through the complexities of food authenticity, thereby bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and practical application. This collaborative journey not only enhances students' culinary skills but also cultivates an appreciation for diverse food cultures and ethical practices. Ultimately, this study contributes to the discourse on authentic food education, advocating for a holistic approach that integrates academic rigor with real-world experiences. By fostering collaboration, the hospitality industry can nurture a new generation of professionals equipped to navigate and innovate within the dynamic food landscape.

Keywords: authentic food, collaboration, conceptualization, hospitality education

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving hospitality industry, the ability to create authentic food experiences is a critical skill for both educators and students. As culinary trends shift towards more sustainable and culturally meaningful dining experiences, hospitality education must adapt to equip future professionals with the tools necessary for food innovation. This dynamic environment calls for collaborative efforts between educators and students to conceptualize food in ways that honor tradition while embracing modern culinary trends. Such collaborations not only foster creativity but also enhance cultural understanding and practical problem-solving skills within the context of food and beverage management.

Within educational institutions, there is a growing emphasis on integrating authentic food concept development into hospitality curricula. Such initiatives not only enhance the skill set of future professionals but also enrich the overall understanding of food's role in tourism. Consumers now seek not just meals but experiences that reflect the heritage and identity of the regions they explore. This puts pressure on hospitality programs to incorporate collaborative models that encourage students to think creatively and engage in meaningful partnerships with educators to develop food concepts that meet contemporary consumer demands (Sims, 2009).

Collaboration between hospitality educators and students in the development of authentic food concepts encourages an exchange of ideas and skills that benefit both parties. Educators bring their extensive knowledge of culinary traditions and industry standards, while students contribute fresh perspectives and a willingness to experiment with new concepts. Bendegul Okumus (2021) highlights that food tourism research has made

substantial strides, with an increasing focus on designing unique food experiences and embedding authenticity into destination marketing. Authenticity in food tourism can be categorized into various forms—objective, existential, and constructive—all of which are pivotal in shaping how food is perceived and experienced by visitors (Okumus, 2020).

In this paper, we explore the collaborative journey of hospitality educators and students in authentic food conceptualization, focusing on how these partnerships lead to innovative and culturally significant food experiences. Through a detailed analysis of case studies and real-world applications, we aim to demonstrate the value of such collaborations in shaping the future of the hospitality industry.

FRAMEWORK

The study is anchored on the concept of Experiential Learning Theory and Collaborative Learning Framework in hospitality education. Experiential learning emphasizes learning through direct experience, reflection, experimentation, and active participation. In culinary and hospitality education, students gain knowledge through hands-on activities such as recipe development, food innovation, and product conceptualization.

The framework also integrates collaborative learning, where educators and students work together in developing authentic food concepts. Educators provide mentorship, technical guidance, and industry standards, while students contribute creativity and innovation. The interaction between these two groups results in improved food conceptualization outcomes and enhanced professional competencies.

The conceptual framework of the study focuses on the relationship between:

- Authentic food conceptualization
- Collaboration and mentorship
- Challenges in food innovation
- Adaptive strategies
- Culinary innovation outcomes

The framework assumes that effective mentorship and collaboration positively influence students' ability to develop innovative and culturally authentic food products despite operational and creative challenges.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aimed to explore authentic food conceptualization among hospitality educators and students.

Specifically, it sought to:

1. Identify the importance of authentic and high-quality ingredients in food conceptualization.
2. Determine the challenges encountered by students during food innovation and recipe development.
3. Examine the role of mentorship and collaboration in culinary conceptualization.
4. Identify adaptive strategies used by students and educators in overcoming conceptualization barriers.
5. Explore how experiential learning contributes to hospitality education and food innovation.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research design to explore the experiences, challenges, and collaborative processes involved in authentic food conceptualization among hospitality students and educators. Qualitative research is appropriate when a study seeks to understand participants' perspectives, behaviors, and lived experiences in a natural setting. The design enabled the researchers to gather rich and detailed information regarding how students and mentors conceptualize innovative food products while maintaining cultural authenticity.

Specifically, the study employed Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as the primary method of data collection. FGDs allowed participants to interact, exchange ideas, and collectively discuss their experiences in food innovation and culinary conceptualization. This approach provided deeper insights into the collaborative learning process between educators and students. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018), qualitative inquiry is effective in understanding social phenomena through participants' perspectives and interpretations.

The qualitative approach was deemed appropriate because the study focused on understanding meanings, processes, and experiences rather than measuring numerical data. It also allowed the researchers to identify recurring themes and patterns related to authenticity, mentorship, challenges, and adaptive strategies in food conceptualization.

Research Environment

The study was conducted within a hospitality education setting where students were actively engaged in Restaurant Operations Management and food innovation activities. The research environment included culinary laboratories, hospitality classrooms, and food preparation areas where students and educators collaborated in developing authentic food concepts.

Research Informants

The informants of the study consisted of fourth-year hospitality management students enrolled in Restaurant Operations Management courses together with their mentors and hospitality educators. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that all informants possessed relevant experience in food conceptualization and hospitality operations.

The students were chosen because they were directly involved in culinary innovation projects and authentic food development activities as part of their academic requirements. Meanwhile, mentors and educators were included because of their expertise in culinary management, food preparation, and hospitality education.

The inclusion of both students and educators allowed the study to capture multiple perspectives regarding food conceptualization, mentorship, and innovation processes. This collaborative participation enriched the discussions and contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of authentic food development within hospitality education. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018), purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative studies because it enables researchers to select participants who can provide meaningful and relevant information about the phenomenon under investigation.

Research Instruments

The primary research instrument used in this study was a semi-structured interview guide utilized during the Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to encourage participants to share their experiences, opinions, and insights regarding authentic food conceptualization. Open-ended questions allowed participants to elaborate freely and provide in-depth responses. The semi-structured format also enabled the researchers to ask follow-up questions whenever clarification or additional information was necessary. To ensure the validity and relevance of the instrument, the interview questions were aligned with the objectives of the study and reviewed by knowledgeable individuals in hospitality and research. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018), semi-structured interviews are highly effective in qualitative studies because they provide flexibility while maintaining consistency in data gathering.

Research Procedures

The researchers first sought permission from the appropriate academic authorities before conducting the study. After approval was granted, the researchers identified qualified participants using purposive sampling techniques. Once the participants were selected, the researchers explained the purpose of the study, including

the importance of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and ethical considerations. Informed consent was obtained prior to the conduct of the Focus Group Discussions.

The FGDs were conducted in a comfortable and conducive environment to encourage open communication among participants. Each session lasted approximately 60 minutes and was guided by the semi-structured interview questions. The researchers facilitated the discussions and ensured that all participants were given equal opportunities to express their thoughts and experiences. During the discussions, responses were carefully recorded and documented for analysis. After data collection, the recorded responses were transcribed and organized systematically. The researchers then analyzed the data through thematic analysis by identifying recurring themes, patterns, and significant statements related to authentic food conceptualization.

This systematic procedure ensured the credibility, trustworthiness, and organization of the collected qualitative data.

Treatment of Data

The data gathered from the Focus Group Discussions were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis method used to identify, analyze, and interpret recurring patterns or themes within textual data.

The researchers first transcribed the recorded discussions verbatim to ensure accuracy. After transcription, the data were carefully read and reviewed multiple times to familiarize the researchers with the participants' responses. Initial codes were then assigned to significant statements and responses related to food conceptualization, ingredient authenticity, mentorship, challenges, and adaptive strategies.

The coded responses were grouped into broader themes that reflected the common experiences and perspectives of the participants. Themes such as "authenticity and quality of ingredients," "barriers in food conceptualization," and "guidance from experts" emerged from the analysis.

Inductive coding was utilized to allow themes to naturally emerge from the participants' responses rather than imposing predetermined categories. According to John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018), thematic analysis is effective in qualitative studies because it allows researchers to interpret meanings and patterns embedded within participants' experiences. The analyzed data were then interpreted and presented narratively to provide a deeper understanding of authentic food conceptualization among hospitality students and educators.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The focus group discussions generated rich insights into the process of authentic food conceptualization among hospitality students and educators. Several recurring themes emerged from the participants' responses, including the importance of ingredient authenticity and quality, preservation of cultural identity, challenges in food innovation, and the significant role of mentorship and collaboration. These findings demonstrate how hospitality students navigate both creative and technical challenges in developing innovative food concepts while maintaining cultural relevance and authenticity.

Authenticity and Quality of Ingredients

Participants consistently emphasized the importance of using authentic and high-quality ingredients in creating innovative food products. Students highlighted that ingredient selection plays a critical role in preserving the uniqueness and cultural identity of their culinary concepts. The use of local spices, indigenous ingredients, and culturally familiar flavors was viewed as essential in achieving authenticity and consumer appeal.

Respondent 1 stated:

Importante gihap an pagiging kakaiba an mahemo namon na produkto labi na amon gamit na panakot.

(It is also important that we can create a unique product, especially through the spices or seasonings we use).

This response suggests that students value originality and cultural distinction when conceptualizing food products. Participants believed that authentic ingredients not only improve flavor quality but also strengthen the connection between food and local identity.

The findings indicate that students recognize food innovation as a process that should preserve heritage while introducing creativity and modern presentation. The findings support the study of Peter Björk and Hannele Kauppinen-Räsänen (2016), who emphasized that local ingredients significantly contribute to authentic culinary experiences and food tourism development. Their study revealed that tourists and consumers are increasingly attracted to food products that reflect the culture and traditions of a destination. Similarly, Rebecca Sims (2009) explained that local food enhances sustainable tourism experiences by strengthening the relationship between place, culture, and authenticity.

Related studies further support the importance of ingredient authenticity in hospitality innovation. Francisco González Santa Cruz (2016) noted that the use of local food products improves destination competitiveness while promoting cultural preservation and sustainability. In the context of hospitality education, these findings imply that students who engage in authentic food conceptualization develop a deeper appreciation for cultural heritage and local culinary traditions.

Moreover, participants associated authentic ingredients with product differentiation and marketability. They believed that using unique local components makes their products more memorable and competitive in the hospitality industry. This demonstrates that students are aware of the growing consumer demand for culturally meaningful and experience-driven food products.

Barriers in Food Conceptualization

Despite the students' enthusiasm for culinary innovation, participants identified several challenges encountered during authentic food conceptualization. Common barriers included difficulties in recipe standardization, flavor profiling, texture consistency, ingredient measurement, and product appearance. Students described the process of food innovation as time-consuming and highly experimental, requiring multiple revisions before achieving the desired outcome.

Respondent 2 shared:

It pag start namon inin na amon innovation kay naka upat kami na trials gud para la namon makuha an sakto na measurement an mga ingredients nam na gagamiton, lalo na kay an syahan nam na nahemo kay waray pa iya rasa. (When we started this innovation, we conducted four trials just to achieve the correct measurements of the ingredients we would use, especially because our first attempt did not have a good taste yet).

The statement illustrates the trial-and-error nature of food innovation, particularly when working with unfamiliar ingredients or unique flavor combinations. Participants experienced challenges balancing traditional flavors with modern consumer preferences while maintaining consistency in taste, texture, and presentation.

These findings align with the study of Bendegul Okumus (2021), who explained that adapting taste and texture is one of the major challenges in food innovation, especially when introducing culturally specific flavors to broader markets. According to the study, customer acceptance often depends on how well traditional elements are balanced with innovation and modern presentation.

Similarly, Jeou-Shyan Horng and Meei-Ling Hu (2009) emphasized that culinary innovation requires a complex creative process involving experimentation, refinement, and technical precision. Their research highlighted that students and culinary professionals frequently encounter operational difficulties during recipe development, particularly in achieving product consistency and customer satisfaction.

Related literature also suggests that limited resources and time constraints significantly affect food conceptualization among students. In hospitality education, students often struggle to balance academic

responsibilities with the demands of culinary experimentation. This finding reflects the realities of experiential learning, where innovation involves repeated testing, adjustment, and evaluation.

Furthermore, participants expressed concerns regarding ingredient availability and budget limitations. Some local ingredients were difficult to source consistently, affecting the sustainability and reproducibility of their food concepts. These challenges reveal the importance of resource management and strategic planning in culinary innovation projects.

Despite these barriers, participants viewed the challenges as valuable learning experiences that improved their creativity, resilience, and problem-solving abilities. The process of repeated experimentation enabled students to better understand flavor development, recipe standardization, and food production techniques.

Guidance and Expert Insights

Another major theme that emerged from the discussions was the importance of mentorship and expert guidance in authentic food conceptualization. Participants identified collaboration with mentors, culinary instructors, chefs, and academic panels as essential in refining their food products and improving technical execution.

Respondent 3 explained:

Mas maupay gud it naaro hin recommendation lalo ha mga expert ha pagkaon. Kay nakakabulig gud hira na maging maupay tam experiment lalo na it paghemo hin final na recipe. (It is really helpful to seek recommendations, especially from food experts, because they greatly help improve our experiment, particularly in developing the final recipe).

This response demonstrates that students value expert recommendations as a source of technical knowledge, creativity, and confidence during the innovation process. Guidance from professionals helped students improve measurement accuracy, ingredient combinations, recipe consistency, and overall product quality.

The findings support the study of Jeou-Shyan Horng and Meei-Ling Hu (2009), who emphasized that mentorship enhances both creativity and technical precision in culinary product development. Their study highlighted that expert consultation bridges the gap between theoretical concepts and practical execution, enabling students to transform innovative ideas into marketable food products.

In addition, John W. Creswell and Cheryl N. Poth (2018) emphasized the importance of collaborative learning environments in qualitative and experiential education. Through continuous consultation and feedback, students are able to reflect on their practices, improve their outputs, and align their innovations with professional standards.

Related studies in hospitality education further indicate that mentorship promotes experiential learning, confidence-building, and skill development among students. Industry professionals and educators serve as facilitators who guide learners through technical challenges while encouraging creativity and innovation. This collaborative process enables students to gain practical competencies necessary for future careers in hospitality and food service industries.

Participants also acknowledged the importance of academic panel consultations and peer collaboration in improving both product development and documentation. Feedback mechanisms allowed students to identify weaknesses, revise their concepts, and strengthen the overall quality of their outputs. These interactions fostered teamwork, communication skills, and critical thinking abilities.

Overall, the findings highlight that mentorship and collaboration are indispensable components of authentic food conceptualization. The guidance provided by experts not only improves product quality but also enhances students' confidence, creativity, and readiness for real-world hospitality operations.

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the process of authentic food conceptualization among hospitality students and educators through collaborative and experiential learning approaches. The findings revealed that authenticity and quality of ingredients play a crucial role in developing culturally relevant and innovative food products. Students recognized that the use of local ingredients and unique flavor profiles strengthens product identity while promoting cultural heritage and culinary authenticity.

The study also identified several challenges encountered during food conceptualization, including recipe standardization, flavor balancing, texture consistency, limited resources, and time constraints. These barriers demonstrated that culinary innovation is a complex and iterative process that requires experimentation, technical skills, and adaptability. Despite these difficulties, students viewed the challenges as opportunities for learning and skill development.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted the significant role of mentorship and collaboration in enhancing food innovation outcomes. Guidance from culinary experts, mentors, and educators enabled students to refine their recipes, improve technical precision, and strengthen creativity. Continuous consultation and feedback also contributed to the students' ability to align their concepts with academic and industry standards.

The study concludes that experiential learning and collaborative mentorship are essential components of hospitality education. Authentic food conceptualization not only develops students' technical competencies but also fosters creativity, cultural appreciation, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills necessary for future careers in the hospitality and tourism industry. Additionally, integrating authentic food innovation into hospitality curricula contributes to the preservation of local culinary traditions while supporting sustainable tourism development.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the following recommendations are proposed:

- 1. Strengthen Mentorship Programs-** Hospitality institutions should establish stronger mentorship programs involving culinary experts, chefs, and industry professionals to guide students in food innovation and product conceptualization. Continuous mentorship can improve students' technical skills, creativity, and confidence in culinary development.
- 2. Promote the Use of Local Ingredients-** Educators and institutions should encourage students to utilize indigenous and locally sourced ingredients in food innovation projects. This practice can help preserve cultural heritage, promote sustainability, and support local food industries.
- 3. Enhance Training in Culinary Innovation-** Hospitality programs should provide additional workshops and practical training related to recipe standardization, flavor profiling, food presentation, and product development to help students overcome technical challenges in food conceptualization.
- 4. Integrate Experiential Learning Activities-** Institutions should strengthen experiential learning opportunities such as culinary competitions, product innovation projects, food expos, and collaborative workshops to enhance students' practical experience and industry preparedness.
- 5. Encourage Collaboration and Feedback Mechanisms-** Regular consultation with mentors, academic panels, and peers should be encouraged to provide constructive feedback that can improve product quality, creativity, and documentation.
- 6. Conduct Further Research-** Future researchers may conduct similar studies using larger populations or mixed-method approaches to further explore authentic food conceptualization, culinary innovation, and experiential learning in hospitality education. Comparative studies involving different institutions or cultural settings may also provide broader insights into food innovation practices.

LITERATURE CITED

1. Björk, P., & Kauppinen-Räsänen, H. (2016). Exploring the multi-dimensionality of travellers' culinary-gastronomic experiences. *Current Issues in Tourism*, 19(12), 1260–1280. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13683500.2013.868412>
2. Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage Publications.
3. González Santa Cruz, F. (2016). The role of local food in tourism: Enhancing destination competitiveness. *Sustainability*, 8(5), 418. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su8050418>
4. Horng, J. S., & Hu, M. L. (2009). The concept of creative culinary process. *International Journal of Hospitality Management*, 28(4), 499–509. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhm.2009.02.003>
5. Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as the source of learning and development*. Prentice-Hall.
6. Okumus, B. (2021). Food tourism research: A perspective article. *Tourism Review*, 76(1), 38–42. <https://doi.org/10.1108/TR-11-2019-0450>
7. Okumus, B. (2021). The importance of food authenticity in culinary innovation. *Journal of Culinary Arts and Hospitality Research*, 33(1), 45–60.
8. Sims, R. (2009). Food, place, and authenticity: Local food and the sustainable tourism experience. *Journal of Sustainable Tourism*, 17(3), 321–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09669580802359293>