

The Development of Teaching Activity Packages for Culinary Education: Enhancing Students' Professional Skills and Culinary Cultural Literacy under Existing Conditions

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Abstract

In the new era of enhancing vocational education quality and value-added development, culinary programs in higher vocational institutions serve as core platforms for cultivating high-caliber technical professionals for the catering industry. The traditional single-focused skills-oriented training model can no longer meet the demands of modern catering industry transformation. Today's industry prioritizes not only culinary expertise but also practitioners' cultural literacy, professional competence, innovation capabilities, and service ethos. This study examines the curriculum framework of culinary programs in higher vocational colleges, employing literature review, questionnaire surveys, interviews, and case analysis to systematically investigate the integration status, existing challenges, and improvement pathways between skills courses and cultural literacy courses. Findings reveal significant imbalances in current curricula-overemphasis on practical training at expense of cultural cultivation; disconnection between skills and cultural courses; insufficient relevance of cultural literacy content; limited teaching integration methods; inadequate faculty competencies; and incomplete evaluation systems. Grounded in preserving craftsmanship traditions, promoting Chinese culinary culture, and meeting vocational education objectives, this study proposes a comprehensive curriculum integration framework characterized by "skill-based foundations, cultural empowerment, competency enhancement, and innovative development." It suggests optimization strategies including modular curriculum restructuring, immersive teaching innovations, dual-qualified instructor training, diversified assessment mechanisms, and school-enterprise collaboration, aiming to address the persistent challenge of cultivating culinary professionals with technical proficiency but lacking cultural depth and passion. These findings provide theoretical insights and practical recommendations for curriculum reform and high-quality talent development in culinary education.

Keywords: higher vocational colleges; culinary program; professional skills; cultural literacy; curriculum integration; talent development

1. Introduction

1.1 Research Background

With the rapid development of China's cultural-tourism integration industry, high-end catering sector, pre-prepared meal industry, and wellness catering industry, the catering industry has entered a new stage characterized by quality enhancement, cultural enrichment, innovation, and specialization. The demand for culinary professionals in the modern catering market has undergone a fundamental transformation, moving beyond the traditional notion that "a chef should merely know how to cook." Practitioners are now required to possess not only solid skills in cooking techniques, ingredient handling, dish development, and food safety but also comprehensive competencies including Chinese culinary culture, dining etiquette, culinary aesthetics, professional ethics, and humanistic literacy, thereby achieving integrated development marked by exceptional technical proficiency, profound cultural understanding, and well-rounded competence.

The National Vocational Education Reform Implementation Plan explicitly states that vocational education must adhere to its fundamental mission of fostering virtue and nurturing individuals, coordinate skill development with competency cultivation, and cultivate high-quality technical professionals who achieve comprehensive development in moral, intellectual, physical, aesthetic, and labor education. Under the framework of the "New Double High" initiative, culinary programs in higher vocational colleges must transcend the limitations of traditional practical training by integrating cultural literacy education throughout the entire curriculum, thereby achieving synergy between skills development and cultural education.

From an industry perspective, the catering sector currently faces a significant shortage of high-end professionals. While there is an adequate supply of skilled chefs at the entry level, versatile talents combining culinary expertise, cultural awareness, innovation capability, and service competence remain scarce. Most vocational cooking graduates encounter challenges such as homogenized dish innovation, lack of cultural depth in food services, weak professional identity, and insufficient commitment to cultural heritage preservation after employment. The root cause lies in the severe disconnect between skill-based instruction and cultural literacy education within vocational curricula, where cultural courses often become superficial and fail to support students' long-term career development. Therefore, integrating culinary skills training with cultural literacy education and restructuring the modern curriculum system have become central priorities for reforming vocational cooking programs.

1.2 Research Significance

1.2.1 Theoretical Significance

Current domestic research on culinary education in higher vocational institutions primarily focuses on single dimensions such as skills training reform, integration of ideological and political education into curricula, and cultivation of craftsmanship spirit, while comprehensive studies addressing the systematic integration of skills and cultural literacy remain scarce. Grounded in the

educational principles of vocational education and the logic of culinary culture inheritance, this paper systematically analyzes the intrinsic connections, integration challenges, and development pathways between these two types of courses. It enriches the theoretical framework for curriculum reform in culinary programs at higher vocational institutions, fills the research gap regarding the synergistic cultivation of culinary skills and cultural literacy, and provides theoretical support for curriculum development in food service-related majors at similar vocational colleges.

1.2.2 Practical Significance

This paper integrates the realities of higher vocational education with industry job requirements to develop a practical and scalable curriculum integration system and teaching model, effectively addressing the issue of overemphasizing technical skills at the expense of cultural education in culinary programs. Through curriculum reform, it aims to comprehensively enhance students' professional skills and overall cultural literacy, improve their job adaptability, innovation capacity, and career competitiveness, while promoting the living inheritance of traditional Chinese culinary techniques and food culture, driving cultural and quality upgrades in the catering industry, and cultivating high-quality, versatile professionals for the sector.

1.4 Research Content and Methods

1.4.1 Research Content

This study focuses on the Culinary Technology and Nutrition program at higher vocational colleges. First, it outlines the core concepts and educational value of both culinary skills courses and cultural literacy courses; second, it examines the current teaching practices of these two types of courses through research analysis, identifying key issues such as curriculum fragmentation, insufficient integration, and outdated teaching methods along with their underlying causes; finally, by considering vocational education policies, industry demands, and talent development patterns, it proposes a curriculum system that deeply integrates culinary skills with cultural literacy, and puts forward comprehensive optimization strategies encompassing curriculum restructuring, teaching innovation, faculty development, evaluation reform, and school-enterprise collaboration, thereby forming a complete curriculum reform plan.

1.4.2 Research Methods

Literature review method: By searching databases such as China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) and Wanfang, this study systematically reviewed literature, policy documents, and research findings related to vocational education curriculum reform, culinary specialty teaching, dietary culture education, and the cultivation of craftsmanship spirit, thereby establishing a theoretical foundation for the present research.

Questionnaire Survey Method: The study surveyed faculty and students in culinary programs at multiple vocational colleges, as well as professionals from the catering industry, to assess the current state of course instruction, teacher-student needs, and industry-specific competency requirements, thereby obtaining authentic research data.

Interview Method: Conduct interviews with key faculty members in culinary programs at higher vocational institutions, academic administrators, technical directors of catering enterprises, and outstanding graduates to thoroughly identify existing challenges in curriculum delivery and reform requirements.

Case Study Method: Select exemplary curriculum reform cases from culinary programs at leading domestic vocational colleges, summarize their successful experiences in integrating skills development with cultural education, and identify replicable reform pathways.

1.5 Research Innovation Points

This paper breaks through the traditional single-minded approach of culinary course reform that emphasizes skills at the expense of culture, and establishes a comprehensive, systematic curriculum integration framework based on three dimensions: cultural inheritance, vocational education, and industry empowerment. It also moves beyond superficial integration by deeply embedding food culture, professional competence, craftsmanship spirit, and aesthetic artistry throughout the entire skills training process, while enhancing supporting mechanisms for faculty development, evaluation systems, and school-enterprise collaboration. This achieves standardized skills training, regularized cultural education, and systematic competency cultivation, effectively addressing issues of homogenization and superficiality in culinary talent development.

2. Relevant Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

2.1 Definition of Core Concepts

2.1.1 Professional Skills in Culinary Arts

Culinary professional skills constitute the core competencies essential for students to succeed in the catering industry, categorized into three levels: basic skills, core skills, and advanced skills. Basic skills encompass fundamental practical abilities such as ingredient identification, knife handling, heat control, seasoning techniques, initial food preparation, and food safety and hygiene practices; core skills cover specialized capabilities including Chinese cuisine preparation, Chinese pastry making, Western cuisine cooking, standardized dish preparation, nutritional planning, and menu optimization; advanced skills comprise comprehensive skills like menu development, banquet design, kitchen management, prepared meal processing, and cost control in the catering sector, serving as the cornerstone for students' career success.

2.1.2 Cultural Literacy in Culinary Arts

Culinary professional cultural literacy represents a specialized comprehensive competency tailored to the catering industry, distinct from general cultural literacy, and primarily comprises four dimensions: first, Chinese culinary culture literacy, encompassing the cultures of the eight major cuisines, stories behind traditional signature dishes, seasonal dietary practices, folk dietary traditions, and food etiquette; second, professional craftsmanship spirit literacy, embodying qualities such as pursuit of excellence, dedication, integrity, self-discipline, reverence for ingredients, and mastery

of culinary techniques; third, aesthetic and innovation literacy, covering dish presentation aesthetics, color coordination, plate artistry, visual design in dining experiences, and cultural innovation in menu development; fourth, professional humanistic literacy, including catering service etiquette, professional ethics, teamwork skills, and awareness of cultural dissemination.

2.1.3 Course Integration

Curriculum integration breaks down traditional course barriers and rejects the separate teaching models of skill-based and cultural courses. Centered on moral education, competency-oriented learning, and cultural empowerment, it restructures curriculum content, instructional processes, and educational objectives to ensure cultural enrichment in professional skills courses and practical application of cultural literacy courses. This approach enables skill instruction to fulfill cultural education functions while cultural teaching enhances skill proficiency, ultimately forming a curriculum framework characterized by "one culture, one skill; mutual reinforcement; comprehensive education throughout the entire learning process."

2.2 Theoretical principle

2.2.1 Humanistic Education Theory

Humanistic educational theory emphasizes that education should center on the comprehensive development of students, focusing not only on enhancing their professional competencies but also on fostering their personality, cultural literacy, and emotional well-being holistically. The core objective of culinary education in higher vocational institutions is not to cultivate individuals who merely operate machinery, but rather to develop well-rounded professionals. The integration of skill-based courses with cultural literacy courses is grounded in students' long-term career development, addressing both immediate employment needs related to specific skills and enduring requirements for professional competence, cultural depth, and innovative capacity – aligning perfectly with the essence of humanistic education.

2.2.2 Position-Based Competency Theory

Vocational education is fundamentally oriented towards job requirements. The core competencies required for modern catering positions have evolved from isolated practical skills to a comprehensive set encompassing "skills, cultural awareness, literacy, and innovation." The curriculum integration reform is grounded in new industry standards and demands, specifically addressing the deficiencies in traditional curricula regarding competency development, ensuring that course content, teaching objectives, and talent outcomes fully align with industry-specific competency requirements and achieve precise alignment between education and employment needs.

2.2.3 Theory of Cultural Heritage and Innovation

Chinese culinary techniques constitute a vital component of intangible cultural heritage, while culinary culture serves as the core vehicle for traditional Chinese culture. Higher vocational culinary programs not only undertake the task of cultivating professional talent but also bear the mission of preserving traditional skills and cultural heritage. The deep integration of skill-based

and cultural courses enables the incorporation of cultural inheritance throughout the entire vocational education process, facilitating the dynamic transmission and innovative development of traditional cooking techniques, thereby promoting the creative transformation and advancement of traditional culture.

3. Investigation into the Current Teaching Status of Cooking Courses in Higher Vocational Colleges

3.1 Basic Survey Details

This study selected 30 second-year students majoring in Western Culinary Arts at Quanzhou Light Industry Vocational College and conducted a questionnaire survey, obtaining 30 valid responses with a 100% response rate. Additionally, 12 one-on-one interviews were conducted to comprehensively assess the current teaching status of both culinary skills courses and cultural literacy courses.

3.2 Current State of Course Teaching

3.2.1 Course Structure:

Excessive Emphasis on Skill-Based Courses at Kosten of Cultural Courses Research indicates that in the total course hours for culinary programs at higher vocational institutions, professional skills training courses account for over 65%, theoretical courses make up 20%, while general cultural literacy and professional food culture courses together constitute less than 15%. The curriculum design exhibits a clear tendency to prioritize practical training over cultural education. The skills curriculum encompasses core courses such as culinary techniques, pastry making, knife skills training, and food safety, featuring ample class hours and a comprehensive practical training system; in contrast, cultural literacy courses primarily consist of general education courses like Introduction to Food Culture and Professional Ethics, typically offered during the first year with limited class hours, short duration, predominantly theoretical instruction, and no integration with practical training, resulting in marginalized status and failure to achieve sustained educational impact.

3.2.2 Course Teaching Model:

The two types of courses are fragmented and poorly integrated. Currently, culinary programs in higher vocational colleges predominantly adopt a discipline-specific teaching model, where skills training instructors focus solely on technical instruction, while cultural course instructors concentrate exclusively on theoretical lectures, resulting in a lack of interconnection between teaching components. Skills-based classes concentrate only on dish preparation processes, technical standards, and practical assessments, with little integration of dish history, regional culture, culinary aesthetics, or the spirit of craftsmanship; cultural courses merely deliver abstract cultural theories and etiquette knowledge, detached from actual cooking scenarios, making it difficult for students to grasp the practical value of cultural elements. These two types of courses operate independently without mutual integration, creating a fragmented situation characterized by "learning techniques without understanding

culture, and learning culture without applying it."

3.2.3 Content of Cultural Courses:

ighly general in nature, lacking professional specificity and targeted focus. Existing cultural literacy courses for culinary majors predominantly adopt generic vocational competency teaching materials, devoid of distinctive characteristics specific to the catering industry. The curriculum primarily covers general professional ethics, workplace etiquette, and general knowledge, with minimal integration of specialized content such as the cultures of the eight major Chinese cuisines, historical anecdotes of traditional dishes, seasonal dietary practices, intangible culinary heritage, and the aesthetics of dish innovation. Moreover, the cultural curriculum content is outdated and fails to keep pace with emerging trends such as the integration of culinary arts with cultural tourism, healthy dining practices, and innovative dishes. It cannot meet students' professional demands for cultural innovation in menu development, high-end catering services, or cultural dissemination, resulting in severely inadequate educational effectiveness.

3.2.4 Current State of Teaching Methods:

The teaching models are monotonous, lacking immersive educational approaches. Skill-based practical training predominantly follows the traditional "teacher demonstration–student imitation–repeated practice" model, focusing on standardized skill development while lacking innovation guidance and cultural interpretation; cultural literacy courses often employ a spoon-feeding approach combining PPT presentations with classroom recitation, resulting in a dull format with limited interactivity. Both types of courses lack immersive teaching approaches such as situational instruction, case-based learning, cultural immersion, creative design of culinary dishes, and practical engagement with food culture. As a result, students fail to develop the understanding that "craftsmanship embodies culture, while culture enhances craftsmanship," making it difficult for them to actively enhance their cultural literacy.

3.2.5 Current Status of the Teaching Staff:

Weak comprehensive dual-competency skills and insufficient capacity for integrated education. Research indicates that culinary training instructors generally hold advanced chef qualifications or industry certifications with excellent practical skills, but exhibit limited cultural literacy and cultural interpretation abilities, as well as a lack of expertise in culinary culture research and culturally-oriented instructional design; cultural course instructors are predominantly from general education backgrounds, unfamiliar with the specific characteristics of the culinary profession, job requirements, and technical workflows, making it difficult for them to deliver culturally relevant instruction aligned with professional needs.

3.2.6 Current State of the Evaluation System:

Emphasis on skill assessment at the expense of comprehensive competency evaluation, resulting in a one-dimensional assessment approach. The current evaluation system for culinary students primarily focuses on practical skill assessments and final theoretical exams;

proficiency in skills and quality of finished dishes are the sole core evaluation indicators, accounting for over 80% of the total score. Cultural literacy assessment relies solely on written test scores and class attendance records, is not integrated into the core evaluation framework or skill assessment system, and lacks process-based, practical, or comprehensive competency evaluations. The one-sided nature of the evaluation system has led students to prioritize skill training over cultural learning, viewing cultural literacy as "useless and irrelevant to graduation or employment." Consequently, their enthusiasm for actively acquiring cultural knowledge and enhancing their overall competence remains extremely low.

4. The Necessity and Feasibility of Integrating Culinary Skills Courses with Cultural Literacy Education in Higher Vocational Colleges

4.1 The Necessity of Curriculum Integration

4.1.1 Meeting the Inevitable Requirements of the Catering Industry's Transformation and Upgrading

In the new era, the catering industry has evolved from providing basic food services to offering high-quality, culturally rich, and experiential dining experiences. High-end banquets, cultural tourism catering, distinctive home-style dishes, and creative culinary creations have become mainstream trends in the sector. Consumers now focus not only on dish flavors but also on the cultural narratives, aesthetic designs, and culinary significance behind the dishes.

When recruiting talent, industry enterprises have established awareness of culinary culture, innovation in dish development, and professional ethical competence as core evaluation criteria. Traditional single-skilled professionals can no longer meet industry demands; only by deeply integrating skills training with cultural education and cultivating versatile talents who excel in both technical expertise and ethical standards can the industry's transformation and upgrading trends be effectively addressed.

4.1.2 Core Measures for Implementing the Fundamental Task of Moral Education in Vocational Education

The essence of vocational education lies in nurturing individuals as whole persons, not merely imparting technical skills; moral education permeates the entire vocational education process. Culinary students will ultimately work in the public service sector, directly engaging with people's dietary needs, and their professional ethics, cultural literacy, and service commitment significantly influence both service quality and societal reputation within the industry.

Integrating cultural literacy, craftsmanship spirit, culinary culture, and professional ethics into skills training enables students to develop a commitment to excellence in their careers, uphold integrity and self-discipline, embrace the philosophy of heritage preservation and innovation, achieve the integration of skill development and personal growth, and fulfill the fundamental mission of vocational education.

4.1.3 The Key to Enhancing Students 'Core Professional Competence and Long-Term Development Potential

From the perspective of students' career development, professional skills determine the minimum threshold for employment, while cultural literacy defines the upper limit of career prospects. Entry-level chefs only require basic skills to begin their careers, whereas high-value positions such as food service management, menu development, premium catering services, intangible cultural heritage preservation, and culinary entrepreneurship all demand profound cultural literacy and innovative capabilities. Curriculum integration addresses students' competency gaps, enhancing their comprehensive skills in culinary cultural design, cultural interpretation, brand development, and innovative R&D. It helps students overcome the occupational challenges of repetitive grassroots work, enabling them to secure high-quality employment and achieve long-term career development.

5. Conclusion and Prospects

5.1 Research Conclusion

Through investigation and analysis of the current teaching practices in culinary programs at higher vocational colleges, this study identifies key issues including structural imbalance between professional skills courses and cultural literacy courses, pronounced barriers between them, outdated content, rigid teaching approaches, one-sided evaluation systems, and inadequate faculty resources. The research confirms that promoting deep integration between these two types of courses is an essential approach to aligning with the transformation and upgrading of the catering industry, fulfilling the mission of fostering moral development through education, preserving Chinese culinary culture, and enhancing students' professional competitiveness, and it demonstrates strong policy, professional, and practical feasibility.

Based on the principles of vocational education and industry-specific job requirements, this study has developed a four-tier modular integrated curriculum system. Covering six dimensions—curriculum restructuring, content optimization, teaching innovation, evaluation reform, faculty development, and school-enterprise collaboration—it establishes a systematic and implementable curriculum integration reform framework supported by comprehensive institutional mechanisms, resource allocation, funding support, and quality assurance systems. This approach effectively addresses the educational challenge in culinary programs characterized by an overemphasis on technical skills at the expense of cultural literacy and a disconnect between technical and cultural aspects, thereby cultivating versatile culinary professionals with exceptional technical proficiency, profound cultural knowledge, well-rounded competencies, and innovative capabilities.

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