

From Kitchen to Career: Cultivating Skilled Professionals Through Culinary TVET

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In the Philippines, where food culture is integrated into everyday life, transforming a passion for cooking into a viable profession is not just a dream. It's a reality made possible by culinary programs within Technical-Vocational Education and Training (TVET). These courses are more than mere hobby and leisure classes; they are strategic paths leading to career-building opportunities in hospitality, entrepreneurship, and beyond. Despite skepticism, and daunting looks toward vocational tracks, culinary TVET is proving itself as a dynamic force for developing competent, passionate professionals.

Furthermore, culinary TVET faces genuine and true hurdles. Many training centers operate with outdated, limited, and sometimes poorly maintained equipments and tools, compromising skill development compared to modern industry standards (n.a, n.d.). On a macro level, TVET grapples with low certification uptake which means only about half of graduates pursue national certificates, which impacts employability and public perception (Mangaluz, 2024). These challenges are compounded by lingering biases that favor academic diploma and uncertainties surrounding the relevance of training content. Yet amidst these challenges, the endearing motivation for culinary programs continues to grow, fueled by student ambition and industry demand.

Moreover, this momentum is backed by high satisfaction and effectiveness rates. According to TESDA surveys, about 93 percent of TVET graduates express satisfaction with their training, and employers report that graduates perform satisfactory on the job (TESDA, 2023). These positive results reflect strong alignment between program content and workplace demands. TESDA also champions Enterprise-Based Training, like dual systems and apprenticeships, which solidify job readiness through workplace immersion (TESDA, 2022). Even institutions funded by local TESDA centers, such as in Agusan del Norte, have enabled graduates like Jovani Paayas who studied Commercial Cooking NC II to gain positions aboard international cruise lines (TESDA RTC 02, n.d.). Such real-world outcomes echo the theory and long truth: hands-on experience and focused training translate into marketable skills.

The return on investment from culinary TVET is concrete and swift. TESDA data show that nearly nine in ten graduates find employment or enter self-employment soon after training (TESDA, 2023). These careers span hotels, restaurants, catering, and bakery operations, with even some alumni earning incomes on par with or above entry-level degree holders. A discussion paper reveals that TVET completion significantly improves job prospects for those with at least secondary education (Generalao et al., 2025).



In addition, real-world narratives demonstrate lasting impact. In Agusan del Norte, culinary TVET empowered Jovani Paayas to become a Commis de Cuisine aboard an Italian cruise ship, a diasporic career that sends income home. Similarly, Marie, a Bread and Pastry NC II grantee, started a small bakery that now supports her family (Dar, 2024). These stories exemplify how technical competence, combined with determination, can transform licenses into livelihoods and generate ripple effects in communities.

Critics argue that TVET lacks prestige or long-term earning potential. But when graduates are thriving in international kitchens, managing food businesses, or mentoring apprentices, their careers reflect professionalism and sustainability. The core issue is not the path but the support behind it modernized facilities, industry partnerships, recognized certificates, and public respect. As TESDA continues to expand its enterprise-based training and coordinate with industry boards, the quality and relevance of culinary TVET advance in parallel but not yet as the same calibre to universities (TESDA, 2022; TESDA, 2023).

In conclusion, culinary education through TVET is more than vocational instruction, its vocational transformation. By confronting challenges and capitalizing on industry-linked benefits, Filipino culinary graduates are proving that kitchen doors open to meaningful careers. Their achievements challenge outdated hierarchies, redefine professionalism, and contribute to food culture and economy. Culinary TVET isn't a backup—it's a bold career choice, equipping professionals to feed the nation's future.

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