Transforming Culinary Arts Education for Epistemic Access and Professional Formation

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Abstract: In the current South African higher education context, Culinary Arts curricula must respond to industry expectations, student needs, and regulatory standards to address graduate employability, sector requirements, and educational transformation. This paper reports the fifth phase of a multi-phase project: a qualitative framework analysis, following Ritchie and Spencer (2002) and de Camargo et al. (2022), undertaken to identify and evaluate existing curriculum transformation frameworks. Thirty-seven papers were screened against six inclusion criteria; 10 frameworks were retained and analysed thematically, with findings from earlier student and industry stakeholder phases serving as inputs. The analysis produced the draft Curriculum Transformation Framework for Culinary Arts (CTFCA), comprising six integrated, non-hierarchical layers aligned with the University of Pretoria's four curriculum transformation drivers to ensure national institutional relevance. The CTFCA is the first culinary arts framework grounded in epistemological diversity; validation, practical application, and finalisation (Steps 5-7) will follow in subsequent research. It offers a systematic tool for identifying curriculum gaps and guiding curriculum redevelopment in South African higher education. This framework explicitly integrates cultural heritage, indigenous ingredients, diverse culinary practices, sustainability principles, technological innovation, and employability skills into the curriculum. This research advances understanding of curriculum transformation by combining culinary arts with the development of an educational framework appropriate to a multicultural society.

Keywords: Culinary Arts; Curriculum Transformation; Epistemic Access; Professional Formation; South Africa; Higher Education; Framework Analysis.

1. Introduction, Background and Problem

The global hospitality and tourism industry is one of the largest and fastest-growing employers, accounting for 9.8% of global GDP (WTTC, 2026) and demonstrating “dynamic growth in recent years” (Maliuta et al., 2025). It still mostly depends on the precision of the strict Brigade chain-of-command system, which separates and delegates tasks to different operational sections. However, today’s employers require more from employees than simply following a single central authority. Commercial food and hospitality industries respond to globalisation by modernising and/or westernising local cuisines to meet the constantly evolving needs of global and local citizens. Consequently, employers need staff who can multitask, think critically, and present a professional image. Employees must understand demanding client needs while accommodating co-workers with varying levels of experience (Lortie et al., 2023).

Like other university disciplines, Culinary Arts education faces growing scrutiny from funding bodies, employers, and students demanding accountability (Ellen & Pilling, 2002). Institutions must show that graduates possess entry-level workplace skills (Hillebrand, 2014) and are held responsible for meeting employer needs (Estenson, 1999), making periodic curriculum review essential.

Globally and in South Africa, higher education institutions face several challenges. These include rapid growth in student numbers, competition from private providers, and new modes of educational delivery. Furthermore, worldwide concerns persist that institutions are failing to produce graduates with lifelong learning and professional skills (Shah et al., 2015). These concerns underscore the need to address the gap between the employability skills graduates acquire and those employers require of potential graduates.

Institutions increasingly implement initiatives to address industry demands for graduates with the right employability skills, such as curriculum transformation drives to enhance graduate readiness and job-market preparation (Ellen & Pilling, 2002). In South Africa, with its colonial and apartheid history, updating the curriculum by incorporating food culture, currently underrepresented in most culinary arts syllabi, is crucial.

In the South African context, epistemological access concerns "educational outcomes and ways of keeping the individual enrolled and ensuring good quality education" (Du Plooy & Zilindile, 2014). This concept builds on work by Morrow (2009). Morrow distinguishes between merely being admitted to a university and genuinely gaining access to the knowledge, practices, and discourses of a discipline.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) governs SA's classification and registration of educational and vocational qualifications across 10 levels and three bands (schools, colleges, and universities). The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) oversees the NQF, advancing its objectives, development and coordination under the NQF Act (Section 13) (SAQA, 2023).

Curriculum transformation involves critically reflecting on outcomes and impacts through student-centred learning and ongoing stakeholder engagement to meet industry and societal needs (University of Washington, 2017). In culinary education, challenges such as hybrid learning spaces, flexible outcomes, technology integration, and entrepreneurial development are relevant within a globally competitive context (Jacobs, 2010; Mendy & Madiope, 2020). UP's Transformation Framework—"Reimagining Curricula for a Just University in a vibrant democracy"—rests on four drivers (Table 1) that are essential to the holistic transformation of the culinary arts curriculum.

Table 1: The four curriculum transformation drivers of the University of Pretoria

Driver	Name	Core Requirement for Culinary Arts curriculum transformation
D1	Responsiveness to Social Context	Curricula must reflect local and global contexts, histories, and social justice issues. In culinary arts, where food knowledge is often marginalised, this raises key questions: what historical forces determined which cuisines are taught as 'professional', and how do food security and inequality shape curriculum content and access?
D2	Epistemological Diversity	Centralise African and Global South knowledges, experiences, and worldviews, questioning whose knowledge counts and why. In culinary arts, this means interrogating the dominance of French and European traditions and centring African, Asian, and indigenous culinary epistemologies as equally valid knowledge systems.
D3	Renewal of Pedagogy and Classroom Practices	Moves beyond transmission models toward participatory, student-centred, critically engaged pedagogies. In culinary arts, this means hands-on, experiential, culturally responsive teaching that validates students' heritage food knowledge alongside classical technique.
D4	Institutional Culture of Openness and Critical Reflection	Embeds curriculum transformation in a culture of dialogue, self-examination, and ongoing institutional accountability. In culinary arts, staff critically examine their own training and assumptions about culinary standards, treating transformation as a continuous process rather than a once-off structural event.

Transforming the culinary arts curriculum toward student-centred learning may produce graduates equipped for modern industry needs, while giving them insight into how their work can help address South Africa's socio-economic inequalities.

Globalisation's socio-economic impacts—on the earth, ecology, indigenous people, women, the poor, and other vulnerable groups—challenge every aspect of life (Kunnie, 2015). The commercial food industry contributes to this through the modernisation and westernisation of local cuisine. Post-1994 South Africa adopted a transformative vision to build an equal, free, democratic society by addressing socio-economic inequality (Adonis & Silinda, 2021). Curriculum transformation must engage the Afro-global context by recognising the social histories and legacies that shape lived experiences. This approach directly aligns with South Africa's National Development Plan 2030 (Mbanda & Fourie, 2020) and the Africa Agenda 2063 (Ndizera & Muzee, 2018). It also supports the broader UN Sustainable Development Goals (Chankseliani & McCowan, 2021).

2. Aim of the Research

This research set out to assess existing curriculum transformation frameworks to identify and/or develop a context-appropriate model for the Culinary Arts subject. A comprehensively transformed South African Culinary Arts Curriculum should produce graduates who understand sustainability issues, are technologically adept, are socially conscious of the food industry's cultural and ethnic diversity, and can move beyond basic cooking into roles as food experts, business leaders, innovators, and environmental stewards. Graduates of a transformed, holistic curriculum will be able to explore roles beyond the restaurant kitchen, including culinary media, food tech start-ups, food styling, and research and development (R&D). Their adaptive resilience, developed through training in high-pressure, tech-enabled environments, equips professionals with soft skills such as stress management, adaptability, and clear communication, which are essential for the fast-paced 2026 hospitality landscape. They would be able to find a work-life balance for a sustainable career in the food industry. The research question asked which appropriate model (framework) would be needed to make the necessary modifications to the Culinary Arts Curriculum to address student and industry requirements that align with SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority) expectations.

3. Methodology

The research builds on work conducted from 2022 to 2025. The first phase (2022) explored students' perspectives on the transformation of the Culinary Arts curriculum in the Department of Consumer and Food Sciences (Fisher et al., 2025). The second phase (2023) sought to align with employer expectations by investigating the attributes that industry role-players expect of graduates. The third phase (2024) matched student opinions and industry perceptions as inputs for curriculum redesign (Madewell et al., 2003). The fourth phase (2025) aligned the curriculum with SAQA expectations.

The previous phases identified the need for a curriculum transformation model or framework. In phase five, a multifaceted framework analysis integrating various steps as identified in studies by de Camargo et al. (2022) and Srivastava and Thomson (2016) was followed. Potential curriculum transformation frameworks were identified, compared, investigated, and analysed to conceptualise a suitable model for holistic transformation of the Culinary Arts curriculum in South African tertiary institutions (Mbuagbaw et al., 2020). This framework could apply at the University of Pretoria and other institutions seeking to transform their culinary arts curricula.

Framework analysis, a qualitative method widely used in other disciplines, has been applied to culinary research (de Camargo et al., 2022). It was developed by Ritchie et al. (2003) to describe and interpret events in a specific setting. It provides a step-by-step approach and is primarily used for applied research. This technique was suitable for this work, as it creates a matrix that enabled the researchers to analyse data by themes and key constructs. This allowed the researchers to label, classify, and organise data contextually, and to compare and contrast data across the various themes (Delve, Not Dated; Ritchie et al., 2003). The main elements of a curriculum transformation that could be applied to a country as demographically varied as South Africa were identified. It was imperative to represent the body of knowledge encompassing the various dimensions of curriculum transformation and the Culinary Arts subject, while also considering the results of the previous four phases.

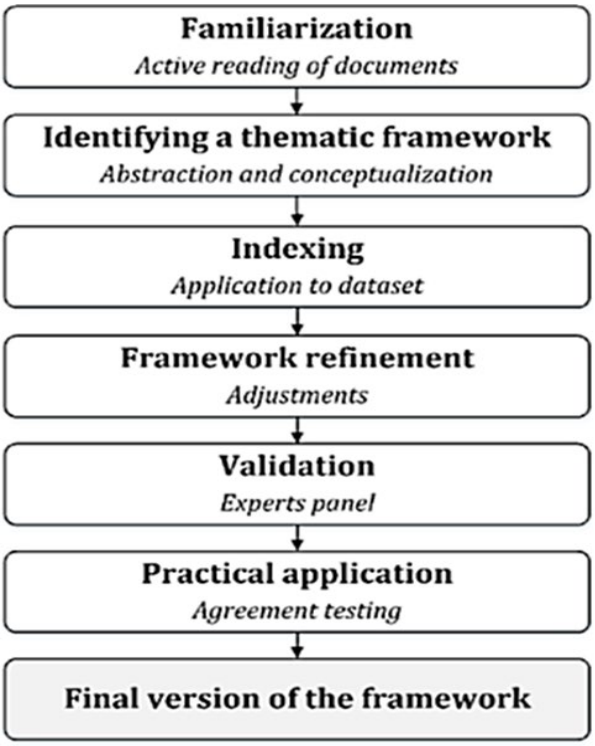


Figure 1: Framework development steps adapted from Ritchie and Spencer (2002) and de Camargo et al. (2022)

Figure 1 provides a flowchart of the steps to be followed in developing and refining a framework, as suggested by Ritchie and Spencer (2002) and applied in a culinary study by de Camargo et al. (2022).

During the familiarisation step, active reading of documents enabled researchers to become familiar with the range and diversity of the body of knowledge in culinary studies and to report on and discuss framework development or application. The traditional keyword search method was used to identify and select papers

addressing framework development or application. Google Scholar and academic networking platforms ResearchGate, Academia.edu, and SCISPACE were consulted, as were AI platforms such as Claude, Consensus, and Gemini, to search for papers reporting on frameworks in culinary studies and curriculum transformation. These search engines and platforms were selected as they provided a wide range of scholarly literature across various disciplines. Selected papers must:

- Report on the development or application of a framework (the keyword 'framework' had to appear in the abstract or the title of the paper),
- Refer to additional keywords relating to culinary studies – culinary identity; culinary heritage; national /regional cuisine; curriculum transformation,
- Be published in academic peer-reviewed journals and publications,
- Be available to read the full text (the full article was essential to enable the analysis of the framework and the methodology used),
- Be written in english,
- Include framework development and/or analysis focused on culinary arts and/or curriculum transformation.

A framework elimination table containing information on the various models, their applications and fields of application, why they were unsuitable for Culinary Arts Curriculum Transformation, and references was compiled. This step allowed the researchers to gain an overview of the collected secondary data, both present and past. During step two (identifying a thematic framework), the abstraction and conceptualisation step, researchers returned to the selected, tabulated documents to identify key issues and themes for assessing the dataset. These key issues, concepts and dimensions of Culinary Arts and Curriculum Transformation formed the basis of a draft thematic framework to filter and classify the data (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). The development and refinement of the thematic framework requires making judgements about the meaning, relevance, and importance of various Curriculum Transformation and Culinary Arts dimensions, and about the integration of factors that capture the essence of the subject within a multicultural society, such as culinary heritage, language and cultural groups and others that may still need to be identified. Step 3, indexing, involved applying the dataset, which required indexing the initial draft structure to the data using a systematic process (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). The researchers applied the framework's categories and descriptions to preliminary Culinary Arts and Curriculum Transformation data, an iterative process that involved comparing the data to the framework and vice versa, using the framework as a tool. Data was organised in a spreadsheet with the Culinary Arts and Curriculum Transformation factors. This process was applied to all the textual data gathered and referenced. During this stage, improvements to the category descriptions were noted, and data gaps were identified. Adjustments in the 4th step (framework refinement) were made by double-checking all categories and arranging the specific data from the previous stage into charts based on the identified factors. This process moves the data from its textual context into charts with headings and subheadings created during the development of the thematic framework.

Steps 5 (validation), 6 (practical application), and 7 (final version) were not applied and will be addressed in future research. The validation and application process will require a range of data collection techniques, both qualitative and quantitative, including physical evidence, focus group discussions, in-depth interviews, and archival research. This is essential for understanding all the dimensions and interconnections of a Culinary Arts curriculum transformation and for measuring the validity and applicability of the final framework's categories when implemented in the training environment of students in culinary arts programmes.

4. Results

Thirty-seven papers met the search criteria and were tabulated by application field (Table 2, Addendum). Of these, 10 frameworks met all 6 inclusion criteria and were retained for thematic analysis (Table 3). The retained frameworks cluster in three application fields — culinary and gastronomy education, sustainability-oriented curriculum design, and decolonial curriculum transformation — and no existing framework combined culinary arts specificity with South Africa's transformation agenda, confirming the gap the CTFCA addresses. The analysis of the ten frameworks yielded six integrated, non-hierarchical layers, which together constitute the draft CTFCA (Table 4).

The framework matrix structure enabled the research team to label and classify documents, compare existing culinary arts content against transformation requirements across all framework documents simultaneously, and identify patterns of alignment, absence, or incongruity. The integration of the multifaceted approach from de

Camargo et al. (2022) and Srivastava and Thomson (2016) ensured that the process met the requirements of the culinary domain. Ten frameworks were retained and presented in Table 3; all were published in peer-reviewed publications, 'framework' appeared in the title or abstract, and they were often explicitly developed as curriculum transformation frameworks for culinary arts higher education and addressed sustainability transformation. Some additional suitability comments are provided in column four, along with limitations.

Table 3: Ten selected potential frameworks (numbering retained from Table 2 (Addendum) for traceability)

#	Paper Title	Application Field	Suitability and Limitations	Reference
1	Developing a framework for Green Curriculum in higher culinary education	Culinary Arts / Sustainability / Curriculum (Indonesia & Malaysia)	Directly applicable to UP's sustainability and social responsiveness drivers.	(Nurlaela et al., 2026)
11	A framework for program wide curriculum transformation	Higher Education / Curriculum Transformation (Australia)	Engages students, industry, alumni, and academic staff as co-designers of curriculum transformation.	(Nicolettou et al., 2017)
13	A Proposed Curriculum Framework for A Bachelor's Degree in Culinary Arts in Egypt	Culinary Arts Curriculum / Higher Education (Egypt)	Strong match across all six criteria. Most directly applicable framework in the dataset.	(Motaal & El Deghaidy, 2023)
18	A qualitative framework for the assessment of culinary recipes' healthiness	Culinary Arts / Food Science	Applicable as methodological precedent for Framework Analysis in culinary research.	(de Camargo et al., 2022)
20	Disrupting Culinary Education: Making a Case for a European Curriculum Framework for Culinary Higher Education	Culinary Arts Education / Curriculum (Europe)	Culinary higher education focus.	(Dalton, 2020)
21	The position of culinary higher education as an academic discipline in Europe	Culinary Higher Education / Academic Discipline (Europe)	Academic positioning of culinary arts as a higher education discipline.	(Dalton & Brereton, 2020)
22	Experiential Features of Culinary Nutrition Education That Drive Behavior Change: Frameworks for Research and Practice	Culinary Nutrition / Health Promotion	Directly applicable to curriculum design in culinary arts.	(Fredericks et al., 2020)
23	Using a Sensory Learning Framework to Design Effective Curricula: Evidence from Indigenous Nutrition Education Programs	Indigenous Nutrition Education / Curriculum Design	Intersects culinary heritage and indigenous food knowledge.	(Green & Chenarides, 2020)
29	Enhancing Higher Education Practice Through the 3D Pedagogy Framework to Decolonize, Democratize and Diversify the Curriculum.	Higher Education Curriculum Transformation	Applicable to decolonising and diversifying higher education curricula, including culinary arts.	(Gabriel, 2019)
32	Facilitating Program, Faculty, and Student Transformation: A Framework for Curriculum Redesign	Higher Education / Curriculum Transformation / Faculty Development	A limitation is that it was developed outside culinary arts (discipline-agnostic, adaptable).	(Fowler et al., 2015)

The 37 models or frameworks articles (Table 2, addendum) were read – Familiarisation. This step allowed the researchers to become familiar with the body of knowledge and to categorise and tabulate the 37 selected papers by application field. The fields of application were grouped into themes, including culinary identity, heritage and cultural knowledge systems; curriculum transformation; pedagogy and teaching practices; graduate attributes and professional requirements; sustainability and food systems; and transformation and institutional culture.

Identification of a thematic framework comprised the abstraction and conceptualisation of the selected papers. The selected papers were scrutinised by the researchers for their framework development and/or analysis, and were required to present constructs and concept abstractions relevant to curriculum transformation in Culinary Arts, such as curriculum transformation, culinary arts, culinary identity, and cultural knowledge systems, and to meet the UP-curriculum transformation drivers. Of the 37 papers, 10 (Table 3) were selected as suitable because they met all 6 inclusion criteria. The 27 unsuitable frameworks did not meet all the inclusion criteria, including the absence of an applicable framework and disciplinary or focus mismatches.

The third step, Indexing, involved the researchers evaluating the dataset by reflecting on the concepts and dimensions of curriculum transformation for culinary arts and by meeting the UP-curriculum transformation

drivers. The systematic analysis of the ten suitable curriculum transformation frameworks revealed that no single framework provided comprehensive coverage of all four UP curriculum transformation drivers required for a holistic culinary arts curriculum transformation.

Insights from the documents captured in Table 2 (addendum): Framework elimination – finding the right framework(s) for curriculum transformation in Culinary Arts (step 4) informed the selection and development of the framework's first draft, which captured the main themes and key constructs applicable to curriculum transformation in Culinary Arts. The 10 suitable frameworks (Table 3) were further assessed, and the best frameworks, when integrated, could form a complementary set that provides the key concepts needed to develop a curriculum transformation framework suitable for the culinary arts.

4.1 Construction and Development of the Proposed CTFCA

The proposed draft Curriculum Transformation Framework for Culinary Arts (CTFCA) integrates multiple complementary frameworks into an UP-compliant framework and will be informed by the integration of the ten suitable frameworks and hybridisation from the Framework Analysis. The proposed draft framework meets the requirements of the four UP curriculum transformation drivers by integrating the six layers and additional sources from the Framework Analysis. The CTFCA can be used as a tool to facilitate curriculum transformation in culinary arts while addressing the four UP-defined drivers for curriculum transformation.

4.2 The Curriculum Transformation Framework for Culinary Arts (CTFCA)

Figure 1 illustrates the proposed organised structural design of the six integrated, non-hierarchical layers that form an interconnected system. Each layer is necessary and cannot function in isolation; all six need to be present to jointly reinforce inclusive transformation. The six layers, UP Drivers and their core function are illustrated in Figure 1. Each layer is presented in terms of its theoretical foundation, core constructs, operational activities, source frameworks, and its application to transforming the culinary arts curriculum.

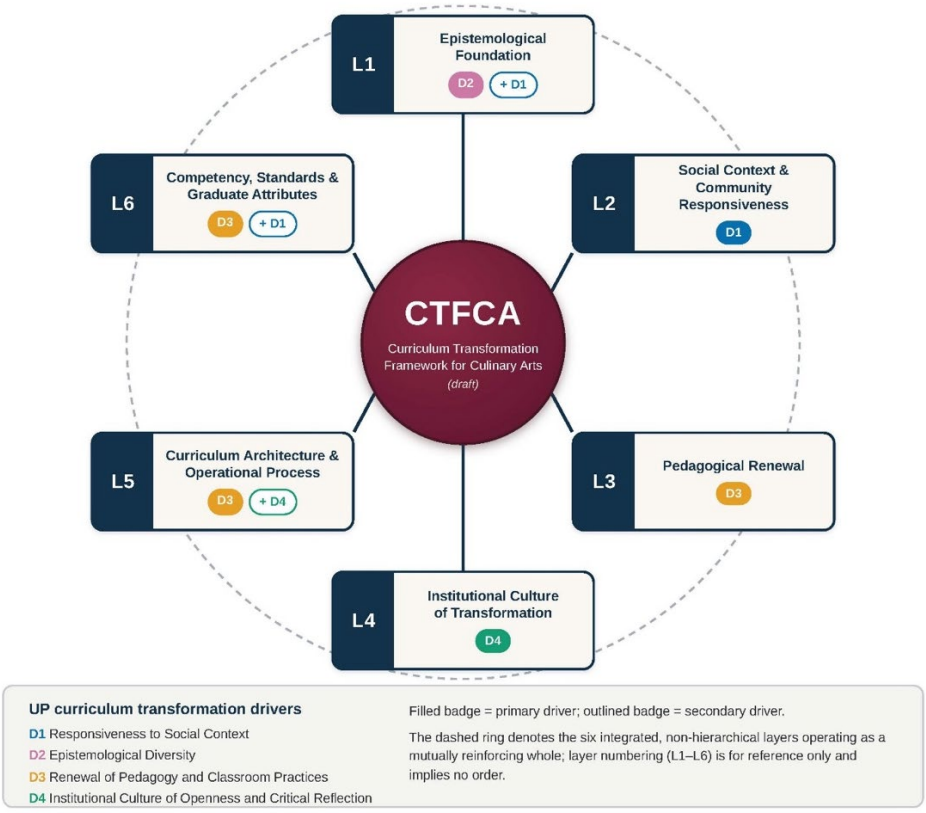


Figure 1: Six Integrated layers of the CTFCA

Table 4: Six Integrated layers of the CTFCA

Layer	Name	Primary UP Driver	Core Function & CTFCA application	Key Source Frameworks
L1	Epistemological Foundation	D2 (Primary) + D1	The epistemological foundation — the ground on which all other transformations rest. Defining structural feature. Africanisation, 3D Pedagogy decolonise/ diversify/ democratise constructs foundational.	(Gabriel, 2019; Le Grange, 2014; Mahabeer, 2018) (Green & Chenarides, 2020)
L2	Social Context & Community Responsiveness	D1 (Primary)	Social context – culinary arts curriculum in South Africa. Curriculum decisions are situated within the SA social, historical, and food-sovereignty context.	(Gabriel, 2019; Green & Chenarides, 2020; Motaal & El Deghaidy, 2023; Nurlaela et al., 2026)
L3	Pedagogical Renewal	D3 (Primary)	Transformed pedagogy – transformed curriculum. Framework integration constitutes a comprehensive pedagogical renewal.	(Fowler et al., 2015; Fredericks et al., 2020; Gabriel, 2019; Green & Chenarides, 2020; Nicolettou et al., 2017; Nurlaela et al., 2026)
L4	Institutional Culture of Transformation	D4 (Primary)	Institutional culture – supports, enables, and sustains curriculum transformation.	(Dalton, 2020; Dalton & Brereton, 2020; Fowler et al., 2015; Gabriel, 2019; Nicolettou et al., 2017)
L5	Curriculum Architecture & Operational Process	D3 + D4	Operational scaffold – coherent, implementable curriculum. Process-oriented institutional culture to include the decolonial depth dimension.	(Fowler et al., 2015; Motaal & El Deghaidy, 2023; Nicolettou et al., 2017)
L6	Competency, Standards & Graduate Attributes	D3 + D1	Graduates – competent, professionally credible, and socially responsible.	(de Camargo et al., 2022; Fredericks et al., 2020; Motaal & El Deghaidy, 2023; Nurlaela et al., 2026)

In Figure 1, the CTFCA is shown to meet the requirements of the four UP curriculum transformation drivers by integrating the six layers and fusing additional sources from the Framework Analysis. The CTFCA framework makes an original contribution to the knowledge base of culinary arts curriculum transformation in South African higher education: it is the first curriculum transformation framework in the culinary arts discipline grounded in epistemological diversity rather than adding cultural content to an unchanged Western epistemological foundation. Secondly, the CTFCA's integration of the six complementary layers derived from the Framework Analysis is a first attempt to design a culinary arts curriculum transformation framework aligned with South Africa's four-driver transformation agenda. Thirdly, the CTFCA's application of the 3D Pedagogy constructs to the culinary curriculum design contributes to the culinary arts education literature. Lastly, the framework introduces accountability to operationalise measurable institutional transformation practices.

5. Conclusion

Within the context of UP's Department of Consumer and Food Sciences, the proposed draft Curriculum Transformation Framework for Culinary Arts (CTFCA) offers a targeted, conceptually rich approach to curriculum reform, grounded primarily in epistemological diversity. The framework successfully moves beyond simply adding cultural content to an unchanged Western educational foundation, offering a multi-layered system designed to address South Africa's localised educational drivers. It responds to the changing social context, adjusting to new knowledge reforms and institutional transformations. We have shown the specific mapping of layers 1 and 2, which directly provide epistemic access, while layers 5 and 6 provide professional formation.

This paper provides substantial evidence for framework selection, a systematic methodology for framework analysis and comparison, and implementation recommendations, even though the framework remains a theoretical blueprint. Because the core validation, empirical testing, and practical application stages were excluded from this phase, the framework cannot yet be considered an entirely finalised or complete operational tool. Ultimately, this study serves as an essential, deductive stepping stone for local curriculum redevelopment. Future empirical validation and the establishment of NQF-aligned exit outcomes will be required to transform this draft model from an institutional framework into a scalable tool capable of addressing broader national challenges in culinary arts education.

Graduates of a transformed Culinary Arts curriculum would demonstrate environmental leadership by integrating sustainable gastronomy as a core rather than an elective standard. Graduates would contribute to global sustainability by developing seasonal menus, implementing zero-waste practices to reduce food waste, and managing food production facilities with lower carbon footprints. Technologically advanced graduates will be able to embrace kitchen automation and AI, including consumer-led, data-driven menu planning, AI-enabled waste monitoring, and 3D food printing. Graduates with expertise in public health and nutrition would contribute to society as "wellness-focused" culinarians, emphasising functional nutrition, gut health, and therapeutic meal planning, bridging the gap between delicious food and medical dietary needs such as allergen-conscious or anti-inflammatory diets. Graduates will have the awareness to preserve history, the social impact of food choices, and culinary heritage in a hyper-connected global market.

6. Limitations and Implementation Recommendations

As a proposed draft framework, the CTFCA recognises the following limitations that need to be addressed in steps 5 (validation), 6 (practical application), and 7 (final version).

- Reliance on mainly published literature, which may omit unpublished or emerging frameworks, models, or frameworks in practice;
- Emerging dimensions identified in the draft thematic framework must be integrated into the CTFCA layers;
- A CTFCA pedagogical Audit instrument needs to be developed as a validated assessment tool;
- The CTFCA framework has been developed deductively from the framework analysis and requires empirical testing;
- NQF-aligned exit level outcomes for a transformed culinary arts programme need to be specified;
- Although the proposed draft CTFCA framework meets the requirements for the culinary arts programme at UP, further research would be required for national application.

Ethics Declaration

This study was approved by the Natural and Agricultural Sciences Ethics Committee at the University of Pretoria (approval number NAS189/2023). Written informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to their inclusion in the study's preceding empirical phases.

AI Declaration

This document was drafted with the assistance of artificial intelligence. Grammarly and Claude were used for grammar, spelling, tone refinement and shortening of paper. AI-surfaced sources were verified (e.g., all retrieved papers were checked against the original full text before inclusion) to protect the rigour of the search.

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