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COOKING WITH THE COMMUNITY: PARTICIPATORY DOCUMENTATION OF ANTIQUE'S CULINARY HERITAGE

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Abstract:

Preserving culinary heritage is vital to sustaining cultural identity, yet traditional foodways face increasing pressures from globalization, modernization, and generational change. This study, through immersive fieldwork involving in-depth interviews, participant observation, and collaborative dialogues, documented the lived experiences of six culinary practitioners as they navigated preservation challenges. The methodology focused on co-creation, working with community gatekeepers to record not only recipes as living documents but also the stories, adaptations, and intergenerational knowledge embedded in their practices. Thematic analysis revealed three key findings: (1) the role of customary beliefs in shaping food preparation, (2) the dynamic transmission of recipes and cultural meaning across generations, and (3) the creative integration of technology to sustain traditions. Despite disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, traditional cooks demonstrated resilience by blending oral tradition with digital tools and intergenerational teaching. Their reflections underscored that culinary heritage is not static but evolves through dialogue, adaptation, and shared memory. The study concludes that effective preservation requires participatory documentation, where locals are not merely subjects but co-authors of their heritage. Strategies such as community-led archiving, storytelling, and adaptive education programs emerged as vital for keeping culinary traditions alive.

Keywords:

Culinary Heritage, Preservation, Cultural Identity, Adaptation, Resilience

Introduction

Preserving culinary heritage is vital to sustaining cultural identity, yet traditional foodways face increasing pressures from globalization, modernization, and generational change (Dembedza et al., 2022; UNESCO, 2018). The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) underscored this significance in 2010 by inscribing the Mediterranean diet, Mexican cuisine, and French gastronomic meal on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity (Dembedza et al., 2022). UNESCO defines cultural heritage as a legacy of tangible and intangible attributes inherited from past generations, maintained in the present, and bestowed for the future. Culinary traditions, as essential identity markers, foster economic, political, and social empowerment for communities (Romagnoli, 2019). However, these traditions are not static; they evolve through dynamic processes of adaptation, storytelling, and intergenerational dialogue, a reality revealed by recent disruptions like the COVID-19 pandemic, which reshaped food safety practices and health consciousness (Tariga et al., 2021; Chenarides et al., 2020).

In the Philippines, food embodies history, symbolism, and communal identity, serving as a cornerstone of the Filipino "lifeworld" (Florendo, 2019). As Filipino cuisine enters the global stage, however, its portrayal in media and its adaptation by professional chefs expose tensions between preservation and innovation (Marco, 2019). In provinces like Antique, where dishes rely on hyperlocal ingredients (e.g., native chicken, bamboo-cooked meats, and coconut milk) and traditional techniques, these challenges are particularly pronounced (Mabaquiao, 2021). The sustainability of such practices now rests on participatory documentation, where culinary practitioners and community elders serve not only as subjects, but as co-authors of their heritage (Medenilla, 2022).

This study investigated the culinary heritage practices of Antique's traditional cooks, focusing on how they navigate preservation amid modernization and crises like the pandemic. Grounded in immersive fieldwork, it adopted a co-creation methodology, collaborating with traditional cooks to document not only recipes but also the stories, adaptations, and intergenerational knowledge embedded in their practices. The research addressed two core questions:

1. What are the culinary heritage practices and customs of Antique's traditional cooks?
2. What opportunities and challenges do they face in sustaining these traditions?

By centering the traditional cooks lived experiences, including their resilience in blending oral traditions with digital tools, the study aimed to amplify strategies for adaptive preservation such as community-led archiving and intergenerational education. Each Antiqueño delicacy carries a narrative; this research sought to safeguard those narratives as living documents of cultural resilience.

Problem Statement

Despite the cultural and symbolic importance of Filipino cuisine, particularly in provinces such as Antique, systematic documentation of local culinary heritage remains limited. Much of this knowledge is transmitted orally and is therefore highly vulnerable to loss amid generational shifts, modernization, and external crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The absence of sustained preservation efforts threatens not only the continuity of Antique's unique foodways but also the cultural identity and social cohesion they uphold. Addressing this gap requires participatory, community-led strategies that recognize culinary practitioners as active co-

authors of heritage rather than passive informants. This study responds to this problem by examining how Antique's traditional cooks preserve, adapt, and transmit their culinary practices in the face of these challenges.

Literature Review

There are four points will be discussed in the literature review. The Definition of Terms, Culinary Heritage as Intangible Cultural Identity, Challenges in Teaching Culinary Heritage, and Preservation Strategies and Community Traditional Cooks.

Definition of Terms

In the interest of comprehension and clarity, the conceptual and operational meanings of the following terminology are provided.

Antique

A province located in the Western Visayas region. Its capital is San Jose de Buenavista. The cities of Sibalom, San Jose, Patnongan, and Dao in the north and Pandan, Culasi, and Bugasong in the south produce the majority of the country's rice, corn, coconut, cassava, mongo, and muscovado sugar.

Culinary Heritage

A term that incorporates the origins of food-related activities of a certain society or cultural group. In this study, it refers to the trademark dishes, customary practices, and regionally produced resources of Antique.

Traditional Cooks

In this study, it refers to the locals of the different municipalities in the Province of Antique who are considered expert cooks and knowledgeable of the traditions and customs related to food.

Culinary Heritage as Intangible Cultural Identity

Food and culture are deeply intertwined, with culinary practices serving as a vital expression of intangible cultural heritage. The preparation, serving, and consumption of food carry significant social and cultural meanings, often acting as a medium for transmitting knowledge across generations (Monterrosa et al., 2020). Filipino cuisine, for instance, reflects the country's history, regional diversity, and identity, offering insights into local traditions and values (De Villa et al., 2022).

Recognizing the importance of preserving such traditions, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) adopted the Convention for the Protection of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) in 2003. This framework emphasizes safeguarding culinary heritage as part of a community's living traditions, ensuring its transmission to future generations (UNESCO, 2003 in Cadiogan et al., 2021). In response, the Philippines enacted Republic Act No. 10066 (National Cultural Heritage Act of 2009), which defines cultural property as both tangible and intangible, including culinary traditions.

Culinary heritage encompasses not only recipes but also foodways: traditional methods of preparation, consumption, and the cultural narratives tied to them (Matta, 2013). Mercado et al. (2020) highlight the role of food in preserving historical identity, while Mercado et al.

(2019) emphasize its connection to social cohesion, economic contribution, and cultural diversity. The evolution of Filipino cuisine reflects a blend of indigenous, Spanish, and American influences, creating a unique culinary identity (Penaranda, 2023). For example, Spanish colonization introduced ingredients like olive oil and paprika, while American rule popularized convenience foods such as hamburgers and fried chicken.

Regional variations further enrich the Philippines' culinary heritage. The province of Antique alone has 18 municipalities blessed with bounties from the mountains and the sea. The preparation of certain dishes shows people's relationship to the environment and traditional beliefs. In the municipality of Sebaste, "*linapwahan*" is an everyday dish that contains vegetables grown in people's backyards. The absence of refrigeration led to the creation of the uniquely fermented "*sapal*" of Sibalom and "*binabak*" of Pandan. There is another dish that adds the main ingredient "*patuyaw*" (river shrimp) last, carefully watching the cooking process to make sure that nothing spills out or else the "*Angonan*" (a dark spirit) will haunt the cook.

Each delicacy that is passed down from one generation to the next has been refined over time and has a unique narrative to tell. According to Susbilla 2022, from "*tirik*" (sea urchin) and "*tatus*" (coconut crab) dishes of the island municipality of Caluya in the north, through the renowned chicken *Porbida* (native chicken with alupidan leaves and coconut milk) of Sibalom, to the "*Balisongsong*" (cone-shaped steamed rice wrapped in banana leave) of the southernmost town of Anini-y, all 18 component municipalities boast their own representative dishes - distinct but full of flavors so loved by people from anywhere in the province.

Ultimately, culinary heritage serves as a dynamic marker of cultural identity, bridging the past and present while fostering a sense of belonging.

Challenges in Teaching Culinary Heritage

Teaching culinary heritage involves more than imparting recipes; it entails preserving cultural identity, historical knowledge, and traditional practices in an ever-evolving food landscape. Yet, this endeavor faces numerous challenges, particularly in the context of formal education and globalization. One of the foremost difficulties lies in the dynamic and evolving nature of culinary heritage itself. Culinary practices are embedded in everyday life and social rituals; therefore, they cannot be preserved as static traditions without compromising their essence. Teaching methods must reflect this fluidity and adapt accordingly. Another significant issue is the narrowing of focus within culinary education. Often, heritage cuisine is reduced to antique dishes and recipes, sidelining other crucial elements such as food production, tools, and environments (Almansouri et al., 2022). This limited approach risks stripping heritage of its contextual richness, making it harder for students to grasp the broader socio-cultural frameworks that shape food practices.

Cultural authenticity is also under threat due to globalization and modernization. Commercial kitchens and tourism-driven food industries increasingly favor modified or fusion dishes over traditional preparation methods. Marco (2019) emphasizes that structural changes and modern technologies have steadily eroded the originality of traditional food. Similarly, Pereira et al. (2019) argue that new consumption habits, ready-made meals, and processed foods further detach people from traditional culinary practices.

As modern diets lean toward convenience and fast food, there is a growing disconnect from heritage cooking, which often requires time, labor, and community participation (Pereira et al., 2019; Marchetti et al., 2021). Teaching practices must therefore bridge this gap by making traditional food education relevant to contemporary life while still honoring its roots. Finally, while culinary schools in the Philippines contribute to preserving and promoting local cuisine (Vargas et al., 2025), they must also balance global culinary influences and the demand for international training. The challenge is to cultivate appreciation for Filipino culinary heritage without isolating it from global trends. Despite these challenges, culinary heritage remains a vital cultural asset, necessitating innovative teaching strategies that balance tradition with contemporary influences.

Preservation Strategies and Traditional Cooks

Food serves as a vital medium for preserving cultural heritage, with traditional recipes and communal dining practices acting as key transmission mechanisms across generations. Scholars argue that food embodies both tangible and intangible cultural elements: ingredients and tools on one hand, and flavors, techniques, and rituals on the other (Sutton, 2010). This duality reinforces cultural identity, linking communities to their history and values (Timothy & Ron, 2013).

In the Philippines, initiatives like *Piyesta ng Pagkaing Pilipino* (Filipino Food Month) highlight institutional efforts to safeguard culinary traditions. Organized by the Department of Agriculture (DA) and the National Commission for Culture and the Arts (NCCA), this celebration promotes regional dishes while supporting local farmers and food producers (Department of Agriculture, 2019). Similarly, the *salo-salo* (communal feast) exemplifies how Filipinos preserve culture through collective food preparation and consumption, reinforcing social bonds (Mangompit, 2024).

Community traditional cooks, such as families, elders, and local chefs, play a crucial role in sustaining these traditions. Immigrant communities, for instance, maintain cultural ties by adapting ancestral recipes abroad, even when ingredients are scarce (Parasecoli, 2014). Such efforts ensure that culinary traditions endure as living expressions of identity, resilience, and shared memory.

Methodology

The research employed a qualitative, participatory research design with a focus on Narrative Inquiry and Thematic Analysis, enriched by elements of ethnographic fieldwork. This design was chosen to explore and document the lived experiences of culinary gatekeepers in Antique, enabling them to articulate the cultural significance of their food practices in their own voices.

Central to this study was the use of narrative thinking, which highlights the storyteller's schema, prior experiences, and cognitive strategies to construct meaningful stories that foster understanding of both the self and the community (Cline, 2020). Beyond narrative collection, the research emphasized co-creation through collaborative activities in which participants contributed not only their stories but also their interpretations, suggestions for analysis, and representations of culinary knowledge.

Data collection involved in-depth interviews, participant observation, and interactive sessions in which the researcher immersed themselves in the local culinary environment. These sessions included recipe reconstructions, shared cooking activities, and community discussions that allowed participants to enact and reflect on their practices in real time, deepening the dialogic nature of the research.

Field notes, photographs, and audio recordings were also used to support contextual analysis. Following transcription, a thematic analysis was conducted to identify common patterns and distinctive insights. Key themes were derived inductively and refined through follow-up interviews to ensure that interpretations remained grounded in participants' perspectives. This iterative process validated the findings and facilitated a deeper understanding of the evolving nature of culinary heritage.

To provide a clearer visualization of the methodological flow, Figure 1 presents the research process from design to data collection, analysis, collaborative validation, and final insights.

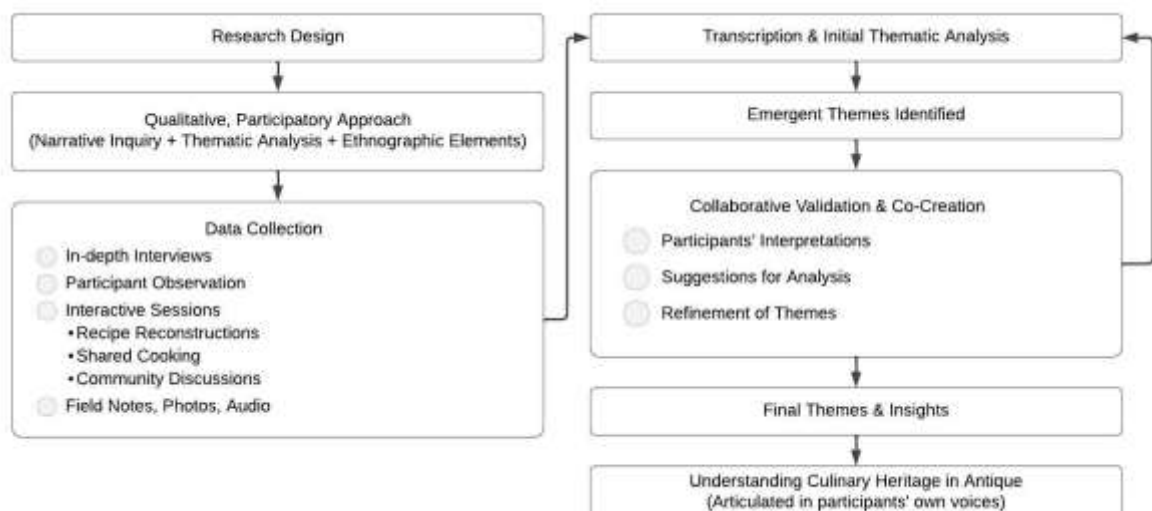


Figure 1: Flow Chart of the Study's Methodological Processes

Results

The findings presented here stem from a qualitative, participatory study that combined narrative inquiry, thematic analysis, and ethnographic fieldwork, with a focus on co-creation. The research was conducted through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and collaborative sessions with six culinary gatekeepers in Antique. Their demographic and cultural backgrounds are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: Profile of Traditional Cooks

Informant Alias	Age	Residence	Specialty
Pinang	72 years old	San Remigio, Antique	<i>Sinanlag nga Manok</i>
Luz	77 years old	Sebaste, Antique	<i>Mikaw (Nilaga nga Manok, Piripinais, kag Bribingka)</i>
Rosa	32 years old	Sebaste, Antique	<i>Ginat-an nga tambo nga may patuyaw</i>

Carmen	76 years old	Hamtic, Antique	<i>Puto Tapol</i>
Leonor	69 years old	Patnongon, Antique	<i>Puso-Puso for “Tugbong”</i>
Caridad	80 years old	Patnongon, Antique	<i>Mahikaw (Nilaga nga Manok)</i>

From the experiences and stories of these practitioners, three key themes emerged: (1) the role of customary beliefs in shaping food preparation, (2) the dynamic transmission of recipes and cultural meaning across generations, and (3) the creative integration of technology to sustain traditions.

These themes illustrate how culinary heritage evolves through resilience, dialogue, and community-led preservation, even amid modern challenges. A summary of these themes is presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Summary of Key Themes

Theme	Core Insight	Supporting Evidence
Customary Beliefs	Traditional beliefs shape food preparation and ritual practices.	<i>Use of indigenous rituals, symbolic meanings attached to dishes. Customs guided everyday cooking and reinforced cultural identity.</i>
Intergenerational Transmission	Recipes and food knowledge are passed on dynamically across generations.	<i>Oral storytelling, apprenticeship-style teaching, adaptation to younger tastes.</i>
Technology & Adaptation	Technology supports cultural preservation and innovation.	<i>Use of social media during COVID-19. Modern tools supported rather than replaced tradition, ensuring relevance.</i>

Theme 1: The Role of Customary Beliefs in Shaping Food Preparation

The analysis revealed that customary beliefs play a foundational role in shaping food preparation practices within the community. These beliefs are not peripheral but deeply embedded in the logic of cooking, healing, and everyday living, especially among traditional healers who view food as a vital instrument in engaging with spiritual and ancestral realms. Food preparation is more than a functional task; it is a ritualized act tied to identity, healing, and worldview.

Among the respondents, nearly all were traditional healers who described how food is central to their practices, not only as nourishment but as a sacred medium through which they enact healing and spiritual intervention. As Leonor, an experienced healer, explained, the reason she continues her work is rooted in the visible impact it has on those she helps: “*Te nagaayad mo kun ano. Kun ma tus an ko nga amo ra ang urubrahon nagaayad bala kaya nga amo ra nga natuman gid. Ginaubra gid.*” [It’s because they get healed. If I discern what has to be done for them to get better, they do it. We do it.] For her and many others, food is not passive. It is made potent through prayer, intention, and ritual.

Rituals such as preparing *Mahikaw* exemplify how offerings of food are used to maintain good standing with ancestral and environmental spirits. Ritual such as *Mahikaw* is requested by people, mostly returning Overseas Filipino Workers who have newly built houses or just bought a new car. If they feel ill, they believe other people are envious of them. Thus the *manugbulong* (faith healer) prepares chicken, rice, shrimps or crabs. The *manugbulong* arranges the food alongside the shirt/dress of the ill person. She then lights a candle, burn incense and say chants. Afterwards, the food are eaten by those who have witnessed the ritual.

Mikaw is performed if one member of the family gets sick. They prepare Nilaga nga Manok, Piripinais and Biribingka. They family eats these together in the belief that these could result to healing.

These deeply symbolic customs extend to everyday cooking. Dishes such as *sinanlag nga manok* are not just meals but cultural artifacts, passed down through generations. This simple chicken dish is prepared using native chicken and *alupidan* leaves, an ingredient native to the area and rich in both flavor and medicinal significance. Pinang, a skilled cook, emphasized the simplicity of the dish, reflecting how ancestral values of sustainability and humility are preserved through food: “*Ang meaning kang sinanlag... simple lang guid nga pagluto. Nga sinadto guid na nga nagahambal ang mga mal-am nga masanlag ta ka manok nga bisaya.*” [The meaning of sinanlag is... a very simple way of cooking. Way back, the elders would say that we sanlag only native chickens.]

For her, this simplicity is not a lack but a form of reverence: respecting what is locally grown and traditionally practiced. “*Simple lang guid kay nakita ya ang panakot wala man it damo nga panakot... ang sinanlag pure lang guid tana.*” [It’s so simple if you can see, there’s not much of an ingredient... the sinanlag is pure.] The use of *alupidan*, which imparts a distinct sour flavor, is also part of a wider folkloric knowledge of plants believed to hold healing properties, reinforcing how food and medicine intersect through tradition.

Beliefs around food preparation are also laden with spiritual precaution. For example, when cooking *payutaw*, a freshwater shrimp soup, it is believed that the soup must not overflow during preparation. To do so would invite *angul*, or malevolent spirits that take advantage of those with weak *dungan* or spiritual resolve. Rosa, a local cook, explained: “*Ang angol nga ri-a... kung hindi kaya sang imo nga dungan... kana na matupa ang mga ispiritu nga mga malain.*” [When talking about angol... if your willpower is weak... then the bad spirits can come upon you.] To prevent this, careful attention and spiritual focus must be maintained during cooking. Rosa advised: “*Hindi guid siya mag awas. Kay budlay guid mag-awas.*” [It must not overflow. Because it’s bad if it overflows.] These precautions highlight the belief that the cook's mental and emotional state directly influences the safety and outcome of the food, further blurring the line between food preparation and spiritual discipline.

Pure intent, mindfulness, and emotional disposition were repeatedly emphasized as prerequisites to cooking. Rosa noted, “*Sa sige mo lang nga pagraha inang wala ka lang may ginaisip kag free lang bala ikaw sa pagluto nimo nga kilanlan matam-is kag manami imo pagraha.*” [The more that you cook the dish, you should always have a free mind and an intent that the food would turn out sweet and savory.] Here, cooking is viewed not merely as a task but as a ritual practice that shapes outcomes both tangible and intangible.

Another key example is the *Tugbong* ritual, which again demonstrates how food is embedded in ceremonial healing. In this ritual, conducted especially for children, a conical rice preparation called *puso-puso* is prepared, often near a river, and combined with other elements like the sacrifice of a pig. According to Leonor, this is believed to heal physical ailments and protect children from malevolent forces: “*Para sa tugbong, para sa bata nga may ano bala kun may sakit, kun may katol katol, tapos ginarigos sa suba kag may baboy... makabulig man ah.*” [The practice of tugbong is for children... it’s a practice that involves bathing in rivers and there are pigs... it helps.] Preparation of the *puso-puso* is a family-wide activity, reinforcing collective responsibility in healing and emphasizing the communal dimensions of customary food practices.

Collectively, these findings illustrate how food preparation in this context is profoundly shaped by customary beliefs that dictate not just what is cooked, but how, when, and by whom. Food is entwined with spirituality, health, ancestral reverence, and moral intention. Whether through offerings in *mahikaw*, the careful preparation of *sinanlag nga manok*, or the avoidance of *angul* in cooking shrimp dishes, customary beliefs operate as a guiding framework that renders food preparation a sacred and socially binding act. These practices resist simplification, operating not merely as traditions but as living systems of meaning that continue to inform how food is understood, valued, and prepared.

Theme 2: The Dynamic Transmission of Recipes and Cultural Meaning Across Generations

Food practices in the community are sustained not only through repetition but through the dynamic, often intimate, transmission of knowledge from one generation to the next. The preparation of food is more than a learned technique; it is a deeply embodied and relational practice, passed down through observation, oral instruction, trial and error, and emotional connection. The findings suggest that culinary knowledge is preserved and revitalized through everyday acts of caregiving, storytelling, and spiritual inheritance.

This transmission is not passive. Healers, mothers, and elders play an active role in shaping how recipes and rituals are remembered and adapted. In ritual practices such as *mahikaw*, for instance, inheritance is explicitly codified: the right to perform the ritual is passed down to the eldest child. Should the child wish to abandon the practice, the family head must perform a formal act (burying the offerings) to signify the end of the lineage’s commitment.

The banana leaf used in the offering is retained or stored based on the gender of the sacrificial chicken, with its placement (porch or bedroom ceiling) symbolizing the continuation of this spiritual duty (Insigne, 2022). Here, food is not only about nourishment but becomes a channel for ancestral continuity and cultural legitimacy.

For many of the participants, especially women, food preparation is intertwined with their sense of purpose, identity, and maternal responsibility. Rosa, who regularly prepares *patuyaw*, emphasized that her emotional state while cooking is essential: “*Para sa akon abi ang pagluto ginasapuso ko nan ga dapat happy lang ako. Para ang pagtapos ka raha namit man tana nga kan on.*” [For me, I always put it in my heart that I should be happy. So that after I cook, the dish would turn out delicious.] Rosa consciously teaches her children every dish she prepares, expressing a belief that passing on recipes is a form of legacy: “*Tanan ko man nga ginaluto ginapaambit ko man sa akon mga bata.*” [Everything that I cook, I always pass on to my children.]

This familial passing of knowledge often begins informally, through what might seem mundane acts of watching and helping. Both Pinang and Luz, highly respected women in their communities, described learning to cook by watching their parents and grandparents. Pinang traced her culinary roots to her parents and grandparents, stating, “*Ti sang una sanda ra mo day lolo, sanda day tatay ra sa kay lolo mana nila guro natun-an nga pagluto.*” [Before that, they got it also from my late grandparents with whom they learned how to cook.] In her youth, she practiced taste recognition and cooking through everyday observation, later earning her mother’s trust: “*Ikaw run bi luto, bal-an mo run na.*” [You do it yourself, you already know how to do it.]

Similarly, Luz recalled being taught by necessity. Due to poverty, their diet was limited, but this did not hinder her learning: “*Panilag lang, alam ko takon bisan ano.*” [Just by observing, I learned how to cook anything.] This observational learning continues as a mode of transmission for her own children and grandchildren. She narrated teaching them about specific practices, such as never covering the pot while cooking shrimp to avoid boiling over. A practice rooted in spiritual precaution: “*Gapanilag, gamangkot man bala paano ng pagtula kayang urang.*” [They observe and ask how to cook the shrimps.]

This knowledge transfer is not only familial but also community-based, especially among women. Carmen, who specializes in making *puto tapul*, described learning through apprenticeship. Her elders involved her in all physical tasks but withheld exact measurements, prompting her to develop the skill through experimentation: “*Ako nalang na naga-experiment...asta makuha ko nga daw naga-flower siya.*” [I only do experiments...until I get it to cook in a flower-like shape.] Now, she trains younger assistants by including them in the labor-intensive parts of her process, guiding them on ingredient selection, preparation, and even late-night work: “*Ginapa-upod ko bakal sa tienda para mahibalan niya ang mga dekalidad sang mga ingredients.*” [They accompany me to buy in the market so they will have an idea on the quality of the ingredients.]

While most learning occurs orally and through practice, some participants have also experimented with documenting recipes. Rosa shared how she wrote down a recipe for freshwater shrimp with bamboo shoots and coconut milk for her children to submit at school: “*Ginsulat ko sa ana ang amo ni nga mga ingredients kang patuyaw with gata.*” [I wrote down the ingredients for cooking freshwater shrimp with bamboo shoots and coconut milk.] Carmen, too, began listing her adjustments over time to improve her dish: “*Ginalista ko eh kung ano ang additional ko para ma perfect ko.*” [I list down what else I could do to perfect it.]

Yet, oral transmission remains the dominant mode, especially in rural communities where written materials are less emphasized. Recipes are shared in context: during cooking, eating, and storytelling, embedding them with cultural values and spiritual beliefs. Luz described her teachings as both culinary and moral, shaped by her role as a mother and a sibling of a healer: “*Kay nanay man ako gasunod bay kag sa utod ko nga manugbulong.*” [Since I’m a mother as well and I follow it just like my sibling who is a healer.]

The gendered nature of this transmission was also evident. Women, particularly mothers, are central bearers of culinary tradition, acting as stewards of intangible heritage. As Rezaei (2022) affirms, women’s roles in preserving and passing on cultural knowledge are critical to sustaining diversity and meaning in everyday life. This sentiment is embodied by Leonor, who

traced her healing and cooking practices through her maternal lineage: “*Gasunod sunod bay ako kay Nanay ko man. Gabulig bulig ako.*” [I follow my mother. I help them around.] Her initiation into healing and cooking dates back to 1995 and is intricately tied to her identity and community responsibilities.

What emerges is a picture of culinary heritage as a living, adaptive process, rooted in memory, modified through experience, and sustained by relationships. The methods of transmission may vary: oral, observational, experimental, or written, but all converge in their purpose: to ensure that food, as both sustenance and symbol, remains a carrier of cultural continuity. Across kitchens and generations, the act of cooking becomes a performance of belonging, memory, and resilience.

Theme 3: The Creative Integration of Technology to Sustain Traditions

While culinary heritage in Antique remained deeply rooted in oral transmission and time-honored practices, a subtle evolution had taken place. Local traditional cooks began integrating technological innovations into their routines, not as replacements, but as extensions of tradition. This creative fusion allowed them to maintain cultural integrity while improving efficiency and precision in food preparation.

Carmen’s experience with making *puto tapul* exemplified this hybridization of old and new. She recalled, “*Kapila ko na na agyan nga trial and error para lang makuha ko nga ma flower ang puto. Sanguna, ginalista ko pa na kada try ko. May measurements sa Caluphet, sa kalamay, kag ang temperature kag time gid eh... amu na gingamitan ko gid sang timer para ma-perfect ko siya.*” [I went through a lot of trials and errors in order to reach the flower-like *puto*. Before, I used to list every time I tried to cook. I had the measurement for *Caluphet*, the sugar, the temperature, and the time... that’s why I used a timer in order to perfect it.]

This account highlighted her deliberate process of combining empirical methods with modern tools like timers, enabling her to achieve consistency in a traditionally intuitive cooking practice.

Other local traditional cooks, like Rosa and Pinang, demonstrated an adaptive use of both traditional and modern cooking technologies. Rosa stated, “*Okay man, bisan sa gasul okay man. Kung sa kahoy, okay man... gasul man kami, basta hinaan na lang man ang kalayo.*” [It was okay when we used *gasul*. If it was firewood, it was okay as well... when we used *gasul* we just made sure to minimize the fire.] Despite accepting gas stoves for convenience, she continued to favor firewood, particularly for its unique taste. As she explained, “*Kay bal-an mo sa kahoy, ang kahoy ka ra pwede mo mabuol ang ano bay, sang puerte ka sabyag mabuhin buhinan ko tara. Kung sa gasul, pwede man nga pahinaan mo ang kalayo kay mas nami gd dan sa kahoy guid ang raha kay iba na ang lasa kung sa kahoy.*” [You know, when you used firewood, you could pull some pieces out when you wanted to control the flame. With *gasul*, you could also adjust the fire, but the cooking tasted better with firewood, as there was a distinct flavor it added.]

Similarly, Pinang remarked on the unpredictability of *gasul* and her preference for firewood: “*Kay sa gas gasul, gas bay ang ga gwa kis-a daw gulpi ang kalayo.*” [Because when you used *gasul*, the fire might be uncontrollable that it could spark or ignite.] She further expressed that firewood offered a more controlled and authentic cooking experience: “*Ang sa kahoy amat-*

amat, pwede mo sa adjust amat-amaton mo kag ang kahoy daw ano guid sa e... daw original nga pagluto nga sato pa nga mga tiempo.” [Cooking with firewood was gradual, you could adjust it slowly... the taste had its original quality just like in the olden days.]

Carmen’s practices also reflected how modern tools enabled scalability. She noted, “*Ang sa mga katingulangan, wala na ina ya sang timer kag ang mga steamer ina bi parehos sa ginagamit ko subong. Aluminum ang ginagamit ko nga steamer para damo ang maubra ko. Pwede ma by batch.*” [The elder ones didn’t have timers or steamers like what I used now. I used an aluminum steamer so I could cook a lot in batches.] While she had moved on from improvised equipment like oil cans, she still recognized the wisdom behind such practices. As she shared, “*Ang sa tigulang tu ya nga nagtudlo sa akun... kita mo na ang lata sang oil? Nan, amu ra ang ginagamit niya nga daw kalaha para grabe ang init. Native gid ra dayun ang akun nga hormador.*” [The elder who taught me... had you seen an oil can? That’s what she used like a wok to get really intense heat. My mold was still very native.]

Clay pots, locally referred to as *anglit*, *daba*, or *kulon*, remained integral to certain recipes and symbolic of ancestral knowledge. Luz spoke highly of the traditional cookware: “*Ang paso ang style nga brown. Nami tulahan. Amo ra anay ang ginatulahan kato kanday nanay. Nami bay ang pagraha. Kung kasirola gulpi init bay lagi kung daba tana nami. Sa mga mal-am kato anglit nami-nami tig-angan.*” [The pot that was brown. It was the best for cooking *tinola*. That was what my mother used to use. With casseroles, the heat got too intense. The embers worked best. That clay pot (*anglit*) from the old days was really the best for cooking rice.]

Her cooking was also governed by inherited beliefs and disciplined rituals. She said, “*Sa balay lang ako nagaluto. Ako lang galuto. Magbaligya sa amon galuto takon, pero wala ko lang nataklubi. Nabantayan ko guid. Nagatindog ako sa gilib dapog para indi mag awas.*” [I only cooked in my own house. I did the cooking. Even if someone sold food, I still preferred to cook. But I made sure not to close the lid so it didn’t overflow. I always stood near the stove while cooking to make sure it didn’t spill over.]

Despite the limited production of earthenware, Luz mentioned that some members of Indigenous communities still sold them: “*May diyan sa mga ati bala duro pa gabaligya. Halimbawa mag fiesta, duro nagabaligya karan ka mga anglit/daba. Nahadlukan takon magbitbit kay basi mapingas bala.*” [There were some Aetas who still sold them. During fiestas, many vendors offered these clay pots. I was just hesitant to buy because they might break.]

These accounts showed that the creative use of technology: timers, aluminum steamers, and gas stoves, did not threaten traditional cooking in Antique. Rather, the adaptation of these tools ensured the survival of heritage dishes. Local women did not relinquish tradition but reinvented it, negotiating between innovation and memory. Their practices offered a compelling model of cultural resilience, where preservation was not a static process but a dynamic, evolving engagement with both past and present.

Discussion

This study found that traditional food practices continued to play an important role in shaping cultural identity, even as communities faced the pressures of modernization, globalization, and generational change. By working directly with culinary practitioners, the research documented

how food functioned as more than nourishment; it carried social, cultural, and spiritual meaning.

The first key finding showed how customary beliefs shaped food preparation. Among the participants, especially traditional healers, food was not just a daily necessity but part of a wider belief system. These beliefs influenced what ingredients were used, how dishes were prepared, and who was involved in the process. Food preparation was closely linked to healing, ritual, and ancestral respect. This supported earlier research that recognized indigenous foodways as part of a broader cultural framework (Dyson, 2009; Azarias, Garcia, & Garlejo, 2022). Practices such as offering food during ceremonies or avoiding certain ingredients for spiritual reasons remained important in daily cooking. These customs were not outdated habits but meaningful systems that guided everyday decisions.

The second theme highlighted the way culinary knowledge was passed down through generations. Knowledge transmission often happened informally, through observation, shared meals, and storytelling, rather than through formal instruction. This form of learning was personal and emotional, creating strong connections between family members and across generations. Elders taught not only how to cook but also the values and stories behind the dishes. This aligned with the findings of Reddy and Van Dam (2020), who described food as a tool for preserving memory and identity. Recipes were not fixed, but flexible and shaped by experience, making cooking both a cultural and relational practice.

The third theme showed that modern tools were being used to support, rather than replace, traditional practices. Participants described using gas stoves, aluminum steamers, and timers to make cooking more practical while still following inherited recipes. These changes allowed them to keep traditions alive in a modern context. This finding echoed previous work on how communities adapted to modernization without losing cultural meaning (Dzikunoo, 2021; Hisuan, Luceño, & Garrido, 2015). Technology was not seen as a threat but as a way to preserve efficiency, accuracy, and relevance in traditional cooking.

One of the strengths of this study was its collaborative approach. By treating culinary practitioners as partners in the research, the project was able to capture more than just technical knowledge. It documented the social, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of food preparation. In many cases, this type of knowledge was rarely written down and instead passed through practice and storytelling. Participatory methods helped ensure that preservation efforts respected and reflected the community's own values (Azarias, Garcia, & Garlejo, 2022).

The findings suggested several important strategies for preserving culinary heritage. Community-led archiving, including documentation through video, photography, or local recipe collections, could help pass on knowledge in ways that were meaningful to those involved. Education programs that combined traditional knowledge with modern tools could support youth engagement without compromising cultural integrity. It also became clear that elders and knowledge holders needed more support, especially in areas facing migration, economic pressures, or environmental changes (Zarate, 2022; Bajet & Garcia, 2013).

Overall, this study reinforced the idea that food traditions were not static. They continued to evolve, shaped by memory, community, and circumstance. As Nagina, Kaur, and Bhalla (2024) noted, preparing and preserving family recipes offered a way to stay connected to one's

heritage, even as conditions changed. By documenting these practices with the participation of those who lived them, this study contributed to broader efforts to safeguard cultural identity through everyday acts of cooking and sharing.

Table 3: Summary of Finding and Strategies

Finding	Implication for Cultural Identity	Preservation Strategies
Customary beliefs shape preparation and meaning.	Foodways operate within belief systems, reinforcing cultural continuity.	Respect and integrate ritual/ancestral practices in documentation and education.
Knowledge passed across generations through practice and stories.	Transmission is relational, emotional, and memory-driven, not only technical.	Encourage intergenerational teaching, family-based cooking sessions, and storytelling programs.
Technology supports traditional practices.	Modern tools enhance practicality without undermining authenticity.	Use digital archiving, video documentation, and education programs alongside oral transmission.
Collaborative documentation validates community voices.	Co-creation ensures that heritage preservation reflects local values.	Support community-led archiving, participatory research, and recognition of elders as knowledge holders.

Conclusion

This study showed that culinary heritage is a living part of cultural identity, shaped by belief, memory, and adaptation. Traditional food practices in the community were sustained through customary knowledge, intergenerational teaching, and the practical use of modern tools. Rather than fading, these practices adjusted to change while maintaining cultural meaning.

Preserving such traditions requires more than documentation, it calls for the active participation of those who carry them. Community-led efforts, rooted in local voices and everyday practice, offer the most sustainable path forward. In a time of rapid change, food remains a powerful way for communities to hold onto their identity and pass it on.

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