

## Enhancing Product Quality, Consistency, and Food Safety of Culinary MSMEs Through Practice-Based Cooking Skills Training

### Meningkatkan Kualitas Produk, Konsistensi, dan Keamanan Pangan UMKM Kuliner Melalui Pelatihan Keterampilan Memasak Berbasis Praktik

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#### Abstract

Departing from the strategic role of culinary MSMEs as a driver of the local economy as well as the challenge of low quality consistency and food safety standards faced by business actors in Lontar Village, this service research aims to improve the quality of MSME products through the development of culinary skills based on practicum training. The program was carried out using a descriptive-qualitative approach involving ten MSME actors who were selected purposively, through a series of activities in the form of initial observation, knowledge transfer, cooking practicum, intensive mentoring, and pre- and post-intervention evaluation. The results of the study showed a significant increase in taste quality, product consistency, mastery of food processing techniques, selection and handling of raw materials, and the application of food safety and hygiene practices, which overall strengthened the readiness of MSMEs to compete in local and modern markets. These findings confirm that a contextual and applicative practice-based training approach is more effective in building the capacity of MSMEs than a theoretical approach alone. The implications of this study show that the development of culinary skills and food safety standards need to be positioned as a core strategy in the policy of fostering regional MSMEs, because it not only increases the competitiveness of products, but also builds the foundation of business sustainability and strengthening the local economy in an inclusive manner.

**Keywords:** MSME empowerment, cooking training, product quality, culinary skills, community service

#### Abstract

Berangkat dari peran strategis UMKM kuliner sebagai penggerak ekonomi lokal sekaligus tantangan rendahnya konsistensi kualitas dan standar keamanan pangan yang dihadapi pelaku usaha di Desa Lontar, penelitian pengabdian ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan kualitas produk UMKM melalui pengembangan keterampilan kuliner berbasis pelatihan praktikum. Program ini dilaksanakan dengan menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif-kualitatif, melibatkan 10 pelaku UMKM yang dipilih secara purposif melalui serangkaian kegiatan, meliputi observasi awal, transfer pengetahuan, praktikum memasak, pendampingan intensif, serta evaluasi pra dan pasca intervensi. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya peningkatan signifikan pada kualitas rasa, konsistensi produk, penguasaan teknik pengolahan makanan, pemilihan dan penanganan bahan baku, serta penerapan praktik keamanan dan higienitas pangan, sehingga memperkuat kesiapan UMKM untuk bersaing di pasar lokal maupun modern. Temuan ini menegaskan bahwa pendekatan pelatihan berbasis praktik yang kontekstual dan aplikatif lebih efektif dalam membangun kapasitas UMKM dibandingkan pendekatan teoretis semata. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa pengembangan keterampilan kuliner dan standar keamanan pangan perlu diposisikan sebagai strategi inti dalam kebijakan pembinaan UMKM daerah, karena tidak hanya meningkatkan daya saing produk, tetapi juga membangun fondasi keberlanjutan usaha serta memperkuat perekonomian lokal secara inklusif.

**Kata Kunci:** pemberdayaan UMKM, pelatihan memasak, kualitas produk, keterampilan kuliner, pengabdian masyarakat

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## INTRODUCTION

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) sector plays a central role in the Indonesian economy, contributing approximately 61% to the national Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and absorbing more than 97% of the (Thamrin et al., 2025). This significant contribution indicates that MSMEs are not only complementary but also serve as the backbone of economic production, distribution, and employment. Their resilience and adaptability, particularly in responding to changing economic conditions, make MSMEs essential for maintaining socio-economic stability and supporting community welfare (Solihat et al., 2016). Therefore, strengthening MSME capacity is a strategic priority for sustainable economic development.

Despite their substantial contribution, many MSMEs continue to face challenges related to product quality and production standards. A large proportion of MSMEs operate on a subsistence scale and rely on traditional knowledge and informal production practices, which often limit product consistency and quality improvement (Nasem et al., 2023). This issue is particularly evident in the culinary sector, where production processes frequently depend on empirical experience rather than standardized techniques. As a result, variations in taste, texture, and appearance can reduce consumer confidence and limit market competitiveness (Tjahjawan, 2022).

The culinary MSME subsector has experienced rapid growth in urban areas due to increasing demand for ready-to-eat food products driven by population growth, urban lifestyles, and higher consumer mobility (Burhanudin et al., 2024). However, this growth is accompanied by rising consumer expectations regarding product quality, safety, and consistency. Modern consumers are increasingly selective and prioritize hygienic, safe, and standardized food products (Azzahra & Alviani, 2025). Inconsistent product quality can negatively affect consumer satisfaction, reduce trust, and increase the likelihood of consumers switching to alternative products with more reliable standards (Asdilhira, 2024).

Product quality in culinary businesses is a multidimensional construct that includes taste, texture, aroma, visual presentation, and food safety assurance (Maharani et al., 2024). These aspects are strongly influenced by cooking techniques, raw material selection, and food handling practices. Inadequate processing techniques and improper handling of ingredients can lead to quality degradation and increase potential health risks (Niqotaini et al., 2024). Therefore, improving technical skills and knowledge in food preparation is essential to ensure consistent and safe product outcomes (Arifin & Arseto, 2025).

One of the key barriers faced by culinary MSMEs is the competency gap in applying standardized production techniques and quality control practices. This gap is often associated with limited access to training, technical guidance, and capacity development programs (Adithia et al., 2023). Without proper intervention, MSME actors may struggle to improve product quality and adapt to increasing market demands. Improving product quality has been shown to directly influence customer satisfaction, repeat purchase behavior, and long-term business sustainability (Martanti et al., 2022).

Training programs focused on cooking skills development represent a strategic intervention to address these challenges. Such programs not only enhance technical competencies but also improve understanding of food safety, hygiene, and quality standardization (Pambreni et al., 2023). Practice-based training approaches enable MSME actors to acquire practical knowledge, correct production errors, and adopt appropriate

processing techniques (Maulani & Rachmawati, 2024). This capacity-building process can strengthen business confidence, improve product competitiveness, and expand market opportunities (Aysa et al., 2025).

Empowering MSMEs through skills development contributes to broader economic and social benefits. Improved product quality can increase market acceptance, income levels, and business sustainability, while also strengthening the local economy (A. Kurniawan et al., 2023). From a sustainable development perspective, MSME empowerment through capacity building promotes inclusive economic growth by enabling business actors to develop independently and competitively (Dewi & Setiawan, 2024). Therefore, cooking skills training is a relevant and effective strategy to enhance the quality, consistency, and safety of culinary MSME products.

## **IMPLEMENTATION METHOD**

### **1. Lecturer Activities**

The lecturers carried out a series of community engagement activities including:

- 1) Socialization and counseling on product quality improvement and food safety standards
- 2) Practice-Based Training and Workshop on cooking techniques, raw material selection, flavor standardization, and sanitation protocols
- 3) Hands-on Practicum Sessions focusing on applied culinary processing skills
- 4) Participatory Mentoring and Assistance to ensure skill transfer and implementation in business practices.

### **2. Student Activities**

Students were involved through the Community Service Program (KKN) scheme. Their roles included assisting in program preparation, documentation, participant coordination, observation during practicum sessions, and supporting monitoring and evaluation activities.

### **3. Brief Profile of Community Partner**

The program was conducted in Lontar Village, Sambikerep District, Surabaya City. The partner consists of 10 culinary MSME actors actively operating in the local area. These entrepreneurs run small-scale food businesses and face challenges related to product consistency, taste standardization, raw material handling, and sanitation practices. All participants are domiciled and conduct business activities within the village area.

### **4. Stages of Implementation**

#### **a. Pre-Activity Phase**

This phase included preliminary surveys, coordination meetings with village officials, participant selection using purposive sampling, and identification of initial product conditions. Baseline observations were conducted to assess existing production processes and product quality.

## b. Main Activity Phase – *Practice-Based Cooking Skills Training Program*

**Tabel 1. Program was Implemented in Structured Sessions**

Time/Stage	Material	Facilitator
Session 1	Introduction to Product Quality and Food Safety	Lecturer Team
Session 2	Selection and Handling of Raw Materials	Lecturer Team
Session 3	Cooking Techniques and Flavor Standardization	Expert Instructor
Session 4	Practicum: Processing and Presentation	Instructor & Mentoring Team
Session 5	Quality Control and Product Evaluation	Lecturer Team

Activities were delivered through interactive lectures, demonstrations, guided practice, discussion, and direct mentoring.

### 5. Monitoring and Evaluation

Evaluation was conducted in two stages:

- a. During the Activity – through direct observation of participants' engagement, skill performance during practicum sessions, and immediate feedback discussions.
- b. Post-Activity (Field Implementation) – through follow-up observation, interviews with participants regarding skill application in their businesses, and documentation of product improvements.

Evaluation methods included observation, interviews, product comparison (pre- and post-training), and documentation. The evaluation focused on changes in taste quality, consistency, technique mastery, raw material handling, and sanitation practices.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### 1. Participant Profiles and MSME Products

Ten culinary business actors from Lontar Village participated in this program by producing various food categories: pastries, wet cakes, snacks, frozen products, and ready-to-eat foods. The majority have been running their businesses for a period of 1-3 years but still face challenges related to quality stability and operational efficiency. Initial surveys show that the product has good market potential, but it requires an improvement in quality and consistency to be able to compete with similar products in the modern market segment.

From a demographic aspect, most of the participants are housewives who run businesses from home with limited production capacity. The lack of access to formal training programs in the culinary field causes cooking skills to still rely on personal experience without systematic mastery of techniques. This condition creates a large space for empowerment programs to have a transformative impact on building the capacity of business actors.

### 2. Implementation of Cooking Skills Training

The training session was held on November 26, 2025 in a kitchen facility equipped with adequate equipment. The activity began with a theory session that reviewed the basic principles of food processing, including the introduction of various techniques (frying, boiling, baking, steaming, stir-frying), selection of quality raw materials, temperature management and cooking duration, and the implementation of food safety and sanitation.



**Figure 1. Cooking Skills Theory Debriefing**

After the theory session, participants proceed to the practicum stage where they apply the techniques that have been learned. The instructor provides a hands-on demonstration of each method, then participants practice it with guidance. Throughout the practicum, the instructor provides hands-on feedback on the techniques used, timing, temperature control, and the final result. Participants are also trained to conduct quality control through taste testing and visual inspection to ensure that products meet the desired standards.



**Figure 2. Cooking Skills Training Activities**

**Source: Processed by the Author**

The enthusiasm of the participants was very high throughout the training process. Many actively ask questions and discuss the operational obstacles they face. Two-way interaction creates a productive learning atmosphere. Several participants said that this program provides insight into the mistakes they have made, as well as offers practical solutions that can be implemented immediately.

### **3. Evaluation of Activity Achievements Based on Indicators**

The assessment of program results was carried out through a comparison of pre- and post-training product quality using five main parameters: taste quality, product consistency, mastery of cooking techniques, curation and handling of raw materials, and the implementation of sanitation in the production process. The results of observation, taste testing, and documentation showed that the majority of participants experienced progress on these five parameters. From the dimension of taste quality, significant progress is seen in terms of better balance of flavor profile, flavor complexity, and aftertaste. Participants began to understand the importance of layering in building the right flavor and timing in adding spices. This results in a product with a richer and more attractive taste than the initial condition.

From the perspective of consistency, the program has succeeded in improving the capabilities of participants in producing output with stable quality. Participants were taught the importance of recipe standardization, precision measurement, and control of key

variables (temperature, time, sequence). The application of standardization results in a more uniform product in terms of taste, texture, and visual appearance. Technical capabilities also show a noticeable improvement. Participants who previously only mastered basic methods, after training were able to implement more advanced techniques according to the characteristics of their products. An understanding of heat, time, and sequencing control helps produce products with more optimal texture and maturity.

Participation shows progress in the curation and handling of raw materials. They began to understand the importance of quality material selection, quality inspection, and the implementation of proper storage to maintain freshness. FIFO systems and storage temperature control have also begun to be implemented by a number of participants. In terms of sanitation, there is an increase in awareness and application of food safety practices. Participants were educated about personal hygiene, sanitation of work areas and equipment, prevention of cross-contamination, and proper handling of food. The implementation of these principles not only improves product safety, but also extends shelf life and reduces the risk of food waste.

#### **4. Discussion and Implications**

The findings of this service program confirm that the development of culinary competencies of MSME actors cannot be achieved partially or instantly, but requires an integrated and sustainable approach (Dallasheh, 2025). The synergy between structured knowledge transfer and hands-on practice has been proven to bridge the gap between conceptual understanding and applicable technical skills (Chyntia et al., 2025). This shows that experiential learning is a relevant approach for micro business actors. The structured knowledge transfer approach provides a strong theoretical foundation for MSME actors in understanding the basic principles of culinary product quality (Bhadra & Djunaidi, 2024). Knowledge of processing techniques, quality standards, and food safety is an important initial reference before entering the practice stage (Abdallah & Shayakhmetova, 2025). Without this conceptual understanding, cooking practices tend to be repetitive and do not result in significant quality improvements (Suardi et al., 2024).

Meanwhile, the hands-on practicum allows participants to internalize knowledge through the process of trying, observing, and evaluating results in real life. In the context of culinary MSMEs, direct practice has strategic value because participants can directly relate the training material to their daily business conditions (Renate et al., 2025). This process accelerates skill adaptation and increases the confidence of business actors. Intensive mentoring that accompanies practical activities is a key factor in the success of the program. Through mentoring, participants received direct feedback on technical and procedural errors made during the production process. This interaction allows This consistency is an important element in building a product identity and strengthening the brand's position in the market. Changes in product quality also reflect the increasing readiness of MSMEs in facing market competition (Bakar et al., 2024). In the context of local and modern markets, quality standards are a major prerequisite for survival and development (Xie et al., 2024). Inconsistent products will be difficult to compete with, even if they have lower prices (Anekawati et al., 2021).

Improving product quality standards has direct implications for increasing business competitiveness (Saxey et al., 2022). Competitiveness is not only determined by the ability to produce goods, but also by the ability to maintain quality in a sustainable manner (Hasbi et al., 2025). MSMEs that are able to maintain quality standards have a greater opportunity to

expand market share (Mu'ah et al., 2024). Furthermore, good product quality contributes to the formation of a perception of value in the eyes of consumers. Consumers tend to judge products not only by price, but also by the consumption experience gained. Repeated positive experiences will strengthen the perception of quality and increase trust in the product (Yazid et al., 2025).

Consumer trust is the main foundation in building loyalty. Products with good quality and consistency encourage consumers to make repeat purchases (Soeroso, 2023). This loyalty is an intangible asset that is very valuable for MSMEs in the face of increasingly fierce competition (Anjani et al., 2025). In addition to repurchases, consumer satisfaction also encourages word-of-mouth promotion. At the MSME scale, these informal promotions are often more effective than high-cost marketing strategies. Personal recommendations from satisfied consumers can expand market reach organically (Purwanto et al., 2022).

Some program participants reported an increase in demand after applying techniques obtained from the training (Alhosani & Yaakub, 2025). This phenomenon shows that improving product quality has a positive correlation with sales performance. Although the increase has not been large-scale, this indication shows the potential for future business growth (Epriyani et al., 2025). The increase in demand also has an impact on the motivation of MSME actors to continue to improve the quality of their products. Early success becomes a psychological stimulus that reinforces a commitment to better production practices. This shows that technical changes also trigger changes in attitudes and business orientation (Al Rizky, 2024).

In addition to the product quality aspect, the implementation of food safety and hygiene practices is an important finding in this program. The implementation of better hygiene standards reduces the risk of contamination and improves the safety of consumption (Astuti et al., 2024). This practice is a basic prerequisite in the food industry that is often overlooked by micro businesses. Food safety is not only related to consumer health, but also to business sustainability. Cases of food poisoning or unhygienic products can permanently damage the reputation of the business. Therefore, mastering food safety is a long-term investment for MSMEs (Parengkuan & Mile, 2025).

The implementation of good hygiene and sanitation also contributes to improving the image of the business. Consumers tend to trust manufacturers who show concern for product cleanliness and safety (Firnando, 2025). This positive image is an important social capital for business development (Suraya et al., 2021). Furthermore, the implementation of food safety encourages MSME actors to adopt a more systematic work pattern. Standardized production processes help reduce quality variations and improve work efficiency. This shows that food safety standards also contribute to business professionalism (Sariningsih et al., 2025).

The findings of this program show that improving technical competence cannot be separated from changing the mindset of MSME actors. Training not only transfers skills, but also forms a new awareness regarding the importance of quality and production standards. This mindset transformation is an important achievement of the program (D. Kurniawan et al., 2025). MSME actors are beginning to view product quality no longer as a cost burden, but as a strategic investment. This view marks a shift in business orientation from mere survival to growth and sustainability. This paradigm shift is very important in the context of MSME development (Pujiyanto et al., 2025).

The transformation of mindset is also reflected in the increasing readiness of business actors to innovate (Spanos et al., 2024). With a better understanding of quality, MSME actors become more open to menu development, recipe improvement, and product display improvement. This innovation strengthens the appeal of the product in the market (Purnawarman et al., 2025). From the perspective of local economic development, improving the quality of culinary MSMEs has a multiplier effect (Veronika et al., 2023). More competitive MSMEs have the potential to increase household income, create jobs, and strengthen the community economy. Thus, the impact of the program goes beyond the individual level (Mulyawati et al., 2025).

This program also shows that skills-based interventions are an effective strategy in empowering MSMEs (Fadhli, 2020). This approach is more sustainable than financial assistance alone, because it equips business actors with skills that can be used continuously. In the long term, improving culinary competence can encourage MSMEs to enter a more formal supply chain (Donaldy & Massoudi, 2025). Products with guaranteed quality and safety have a greater chance of being marketed through modern outlets or digital platforms. This opens up wider market access (Ahmed et al., 2025).

### **CONCLUSIONS AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

The empowerment program through culinary skills training for MSME actors in Lontar Village, Sambikerep, Surabaya has proven to be effective in increasing the production capacity of higher standards of culinary, which is reflected in improving taste quality, product consistency, mastery of cooking techniques, managing raw materials, and implementing food safety and hygiene practices; These findings confirm that a practice-based training approach combined with knowledge transfer and intensive mentoring is more relevant for MSME actors than a theoretical approach alone. As a suggestion for further research, studies with a wider scope of participants and longer mentoring periods are needed to measure the long-term impact of the program on business performance, especially sales growth, market expansion, and business sustainability. The policy implications of these findings show that culinary skills training and the implementation of food safety standards need to be systematically integrated into regional MSME development policies as a human capital development strategy, in order to increase the competitiveness and readiness of MSMEs to enter the formal and modern markets in a sustainable manner.

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