



Bekasam in Food Processing Education: Pedagogical Potential and Social Dimensions

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Abstract

Bekasam is a term for a dish made from raw shellfish mixed with natural spices and herbs. This culinary delicacy is similar to the dekke naniura of the Toba Batak people or the gohu fish, a dish typical of the Ternate people, a dish made from raw tuna mixed with lime, salt, and basil. Consuming this raw fish is very popular in Japan, known as sashimi. It turns out that Indonesian cuisine is no less interesting than Japan's; we also have a culinary tradition of fermented fresh shellfish. The method used was to educate participants not only on preserving this tradition but also on how to develop it into an alternative culinary specialty of the sea or coastal culture. The outcome of this community service activity was that participants understood the value of coastal cultural heritage, which, if not preserved, will be lost over time. The conclusion of this community service activity showed an increase in the participants' knowledge and attitudes toward preserving this alternative culinary specialty as a distinctive part of coastal culture. All participants enthusiastically participated in the series of activities and listened attentively to the material presented.

Keywords: Fresh Sea Shellfish, Spices, Coastal Culture, Riau Islands



1. INTRODUCTION

Raw and fresh seafood dishes made from fresh shellfish have become popular worldwide. This means that almost every continent has a culture or custom of consuming raw shellfish. For example, in Japan, there is sashimi ika, which is thinly sliced raw squid served with soy sauce, wasabi, and ginger as a pickle (Tsuji, S, 1980). Furthermore, in Korea, there is sannakji, which is thinly sliced raw squid served with a spicy sauce (Park, H, 2018). Meanwhile, in Thailand, there is Larb Pla Muk, a raw squid salad with a spicy mix of herbs and nuts (Thompson, D, 2010).

There are many dishes made from raw fish in Europe, including Crudo di Calamari in Italy, which is thinly sliced raw squid served with a mixture of olive oil, lemon, and salt (Hazan, M, 1973). Likewise, in Spain there is Ceviche de Calamares, raw squid marinated in lemon or orange juice with additional spices and vegetables (Roden, C, 2012). Meanwhile, in Peru there is Ceviche de Calamar, which is raw squid marinated in lemon or orange juice with additional spices and mixed with vegetables (Presilla, M. E, 2013). Ceviche de Calamar is also found in Mexico using fresher raw squid and very spicy spices (Lopez, B., & Cabral, J, 2019). Poisson Cru de Poulpe is a processed raw squid marinated in coconut milk and lemon juice with additional spices and vegetables, found on the island of Tahiti, French Polynesia (Pernet, J-P, 2008).

Similarly, in the Riau Islands, specifically in Tanjung Bungsu Village, Resun Pesisir Village, North Lingga District, Lingga Regency, there is a dish that is not made from raw squid processed traditionally and naturally, but rather from fresh clams which they call Bekasam or Mengkasam. Bekasam is made from raw clams with the following processing: First, remove the fresh clam meat from the shell, wash it thoroughly, and cut it into small pieces. Second, after cleaning, the fresh raw clams are then cut into small pieces. Third, they are then soaked in a spice solution mixed with traditional kitchen spices for approximately 10-15 minutes. Finally, the soaked raw clams are then stored in glass or plastic jars.

The global popularity of raw and fresh seafood dishes reflects a long-standing human relationship with marine ecosystems and coastal subsistence strategies. Across continents, the consumption of raw shellfish and seafood has emerged as both a culinary preference and a cultural expression, shaped by environmental conditions, ecological knowledge, and social traditions. This widespread phenomenon suggests that raw seafood consumption is not an anomaly but a shared adaptive response among maritime societies (Anderson, 2014).

In East Asia, raw seafood consumption is deeply embedded in culinary philosophy and aesthetic values. Japanese sashimi, including ika sashimi, emphasizes freshness, minimal processing, and visual presentation, reflecting cultural ideals of purity and balance (Tsuji, 1980). The practice relies on precise cutting techniques and high-quality ingredients, underscoring the importance of skill and discipline in food preparation.

Similarly, Korean sannakji represents a distinctive approach to raw seafood consumption, combining freshness with sensory intensity. Served with spicy sauces, this dish reflects Korean culinary traditions that emphasize strong flavors and textural contrasts (Park, 2018). The dish also highlights cultural attitudes toward vitality and immediacy in food consumption.

In Southeast Asia, raw seafood dishes are often associated with complex flavor profiles involving herbs, spices, and acidity. Thailand's Larb Pla Muk, for instance, combines raw squid with lime juice, chili, and aromatic herbs, illustrating how raw seafood is integrated into broader culinary systems that prioritize balance between sour, spicy, salty, and bitter tastes (Thompson, 2010).

European traditions of raw seafood consumption demonstrate a different cultural logic, often emphasizing simplicity and ingredient quality. Italian Crudo di Calamari reflects Mediterranean culinary values centered on olive oil, citrus, and minimal seasoning, allowing the natural flavor of the seafood to remain dominant (Hazan, 1973). This approach underscores regional notions of authenticity and terroir.

In Spain, Ceviche de Calamares represents a hybrid culinary form influenced by Mediterranean and Latin American traditions. The use of citrus-based marinades reflects historical



exchanges between Europe and the Americas, illustrating how raw seafood dishes evolve through transregional cultural interactions (Roden, 2012).

Latin American ceviche traditions, particularly in Peru and Mexico, further demonstrate the cultural significance of raw seafood. Peruvian Ceviche de Calamar emphasizes freshness and precise marination, while Mexican variants incorporate intense spiciness and regional ingredients, highlighting localized adaptations within a shared culinary framework (Presilla, 2013; López & Cabral, 2019).

In the Pacific Islands, dishes such as Poisson Cru de Poulpe in Tahiti reveal the integration of raw seafood into indigenous food systems. The use of coconut milk and citrus reflects local ecological resources and Polynesian culinary identity, reinforcing the link between food, place, and cultural continuity (Pernet, 2008).

These global examples demonstrate that raw seafood consumption is not merely a matter of taste, but a culturally mediated practice shaped by ecological knowledge, social norms, and historical processes. Across regions, raw seafood dishes serve as markers of identity, heritage, and environmental adaptation (Counihan & Van Esterik, 2013).

Within this global context, the raw clam dish known as Bekasam or Mengkasam in Tanjung Bungsu Village represents a localized manifestation of a broader maritime food tradition. Unlike squid-based dishes found elsewhere, Bekasam relies on fresh clams processed through traditional methods that reflect local ecological conditions and cultural preferences.

The preparation of Bekasam demonstrates a form of indigenous food technology rooted in experiential knowledge. The careful cleaning, cutting, and soaking of raw clams in traditional spice solutions reflect an understanding of flavor development, food safety, and preservation techniques developed outside formal scientific systems (Nabhan, 2016).

Unlike ceviche, which relies heavily on acidic marinades, Bekasam employs a brief soaking period and storage in jars, suggesting a semi-fermented or lightly preserved process. This method highlights regional variations in raw seafood processing and challenges homogenized interpretations of “raw” food practices.

From an anthropological perspective, Bekasam functions as a cultural artifact that embodies collective memory and social relations. Historically consumed as a side dish accompanying rice, it formed part of everyday household meals and facilitated shared eating practices across generations.

However, contemporary shifts in dietary preferences and food safety discourses have contributed to the marginalization of Bekasam. Concerns over hygiene, modern nutrition narratives, and the influence of urban food cultures have reduced its consumption, particularly among younger community members (Mintz & Du Bois, 2002).

Environmental factors further complicate the sustainability of raw clam traditions. Coastal pollution, habitat degradation, and declining shellfish populations threaten the availability of raw materials, placing additional pressure on the continuity of traditional food practices.

Despite these challenges, Bekasam remains an important expression of maritime identity in the Riau Islands. Its continued preparation by a limited number of households reflects resilience and cultural resistance in the face of modernization and ecological change.

The preservation of Bekasam aligns with broader discussions on intangible cultural heritage. Traditional food practices, when documented and supported, can serve as vehicles for cultural transmission and community empowerment (UNESCO, 2017).

Revitalization efforts, including culinary documentation, community festivals, and heritage-based tourism, offer potential pathways for sustaining Bekasam. However, such initiatives must prioritize cultural integrity and community agency to avoid commodification.

In conclusion, the tradition of raw seafood consumption, exemplified globally and locally through Bekasam, illustrates the deep interconnection between food, culture, and environment. Recognizing and safeguarding such practices is essential for preserving cultural diversity and sustaining maritime knowledge systems in an era of rapid social and ecological transformation.



2. METHOD

The implementation steps in this community service activity include preparation and outreach. During the preparation stage, a survey was conducted to select outreach participants, primarily students from the islands. The outreach phase was conducted for students from island regions who were categorized by the survey, ensuring effective and efficient community service implementation.

This community service activity was packaged using an active simulation approach, fully involving participants. Explanatory methods were used in delivering the material, along with questions and answers, and exercises to ensure proper understanding. The implementation steps for this community service activity are as follows :

1. Participants were given an understanding of Bekasam and strategies for utilizing it.
2. Participants were given an understanding of how to process Bekasam as a traditional coastal food.
3. Participants were given the opportunity to actively participate in discussions to ensure a clear understanding of the material presented, especially those deemed incomplete or even difficult to understand.
4. Participants were given the opportunity to practice directly processing raw shellfish into Bekasam

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Raw and fresh shellfish culinary dishes are popular in traditional societies, even among small communities worldwide. This means that almost every continent has a culture or custom of consuming raw shellfish. For example, in Japan, there is Sashimi Ika, which is thinly sliced raw squid served with soy sauce, mixed with wasabi and ginger as a pickle (Tsuji, S, 1980). In Korea, there is Sannakji, which is thinly sliced raw live squid served with a spicy sauce (Park, H, 2018). Meanwhile, in Thailand, there is Larb Pla Muk, a raw squid salad with a spicy mix of herbs and nuts (Thompson, D, 2010).

The coastal community of Tanjung Bungsu Village in Resun Pesisir Village, North Lingga District, Lingga Regency, traditionally processes fresh raw clams with a mixture of spices and seasonings, including cooked rice, salt, and granulated sugar. First, the fresh raw clams are cleaned and cut into small pieces. They are then soaked in lime juice for approximately ten to fifteen minutes. Then, they are mixed with granulated sugar, salt, and cooked rice to taste, and it's ready to be served with rice. The coastal community calls this dish Bekasam.

Bekasam isn't just made from fresh clams; it can also be made from other types of fish, even those not related to squid, and can be made into mengkasam (a term used by coastal residents who enjoy fermented raw clam dishes).



Tridacna Gigas



Citrus Aurantiifolia



Natrium Klorida



Oryza Sativa



Activity Implementation Process

The educational activity on raw squid dishes, a specialty of Resun Village, North Lingga District, Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province, began with a discussion on the importance of preserving local culture, particularly based on coastal culture. In an archipelago where the sea is larger than the land, shellfish are readily available, especially during the season. Shellfish are readily available even outside of the season, though in limited quantities. This means that shellfish can be continuously sourced for Bekasam.

Then, the education participants were given an overview of the high and important nutrients in shellfish that can prevent and fight various diseases, especially cancer, by inhibiting plasmin activity to increase thromboxane and improve the body's immune system in killing cancer cells (Zhong et al., 2009). In addition, the ink that is often thrown away when cooking is also no less important in terms of nutrition and nutritional content. Meanwhile, Bekasam is processed with spices and has long been consumed by residents of Resun Village, North Lingga District, Lingga Regency, although now only a few people process and enjoy it.

Participants in the Bekasam processing training program also provided feedback regarding preserving and promoting Bekasam, noting that it presents no obstacles or barriers. Rather, it requires support from local governments, both at the district and provincial levels. After all, citizens are more likely to follow government guidance than simply learn from users or producers.

Most participants in the raw shellfish processing training program expressed interest in Bekasam becoming a popular alternative culinary product, a specialty of coastal culture, at least in the Riau Islands and Indonesia, or even becoming as popular internationally as Japanese sashimi.

Driving and Inhibiting Factors

The community service activity, which involved educational materials on raw Bekasam shellfish, encountered several obstacles, including the limited time available for the event, which was approximately three hours.

A driving factor was the sympathetic support and enthusiasm of the students, who, as locals, participated in the event until its completion. Furthermore, the participants, who were natives, felt a sense of pride in preserving Bekasam as a local culture, a unique island tradition, and a coastal culture unique to Lingga Regency, Riau Islands Province.

4. CONCLUSION

Following the community service activities conducted through educational methods using discussion and simulation approaches, namely how to process raw shellfish into Bekasam, the following conclusions can be drawn:

1. Increased creativity and technical skills in processing and preserving Bekasam as an alternative culinary specialty of coastal cultures.
2. Increased knowledge, understanding, and insight regarding the preservation of regional cultures that are nearly extinct and no longer popular.
3. Increased in-depth knowledge regarding how to promote regional culture through alternative culinary tourism typical of coastal or island cultures..



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