



## INTEGRATING REWANG PRACTICES INTO CULINARY EDUCATION: A TEACHING INNOVATION USING KENDURI TRADITIONS

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### Article Info:

#### Article history:

Received date: 12.02.2026

Revised date: 28.02.2026

Accepted date: 26.03.2026

Published date: 31.03.2026

#### To cite this document:

Sharif, M. S. M., Zulkifali, W. A. H. W., Shahril, A. M., & Norhidayah, A. (2026). Integrating Rewang Practices into Culinary Education: A Teaching Innovation Using Kenduri Traditions. *International Journal of Modern Education*, 8(29), 1366-1376.

### Abstract:

This study explores the integration of *rewang* practices, a traditional communal cooking activity, into contemporary culinary education as an innovative teaching approach. Grounded in Malaysia's rich cultural heritage, the *rewang* tradition embodies collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and community engagement, offering valuable pedagogical insights for culinary instruction. The research specifically focuses on the preparation of *kenduri* (feast) traditions. By employing the observation method, this study examines how experiential learning through participation in *rewang* activities can enhance students' understanding of culinary processes, teamwork, and cultural identity. Data were collected through structured observations of culinary students participating in a simulated *rewang* environment that emphasized cooperative food preparation, traditional cooking techniques, and communal event organization. The findings indicate that integrating *rewang* into the culinary curriculum fosters not only technical skills such as recipe standardization, portion control, and traditional flavour profiling, but also soft skills, including communication, leadership, and cultural appreciation. Moreover, students demonstrated heightened awareness of sustainability and local resource utilization, reflecting values embedded in traditional cooking practices. The study concludes that incorporating *rewang* practices into

culinary education provides a holistic and culturally responsive model of teaching and learning. It bridges academic training with community-based knowledge, reinforcing the social dimensions of food preparation and the importance of cultural continuity. The use of *kenduri* traditions as teaching contexts underscores the potential of cultural heritage as a dynamic pedagogical tool. This study contributes to the development of culturally grounded culinary professionals equipped with both technical competence and cultural sensitivity, supporting the broader agenda of preserving and revitalizing Malaysia's intangible culinary heritage within modern educational frameworks.

DOI: 10.35631/IJMOE.829081

**Keyword:**

Culinary Education, Cultural Heritage, Experiential Learning, Observation, *Rewang*



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## Introduction

In contemporary culinary education, integrating local culture and community traditions is essential for developing chefs who are not only technically skilled but also culturally aware and socially responsible. Programs that reflect local narratives strengthen professional competence while fostering respect for cultural heritage and community responsibility, which is increasingly important in a globalized food industry that values authenticity. Reviving folk culture within communities has been shown to reinforce cultural identity and social cohesion, helping future chefs understand their broader social roles (Bagherianfar & Dolati, 2023; Huang, 2024). Emphasizing local food systems also prepares chefs to practice environmental and social sustainability in their work (Joshi & Nibhoria, 2025).

However, globalization risks overshadowing culinary identity and traditional knowledge through homogenized, Western-centric educational models. Standardized practices and industrial food systems often prioritize efficiency over biodiversity and heritage, contributing to the erosion of unique gastronomic traditions (Mathew, 2024; Brako, 2024). As a result, culinary education may unintentionally accelerate the loss of local culinary recognition in a global context (Dina et al., 2025; Nagina et al., 2024). In response, scholars call for programs that actively integrate local flavours and practices, promoting appreciation of traditional knowledge while encouraging culturally grounded sustainability (Padyala & Kallu, 2025; Rodriguez & Pedroso, 2024).

Despite these calls, several critical gaps remain. First, there is a lack of structured pedagogical models that systematically translate indigenous communal practices such as *rewang* into formal culinary curricula. Existing studies tend to discuss cultural integration conceptually but offer limited guidance on instructional design, delivery, and assessment within higher education settings. Second, there is insufficient empirical evidence on the multidimensional impacts, such

as educational, cultural, professional, and institutional, of embedding such traditional practices into culinary training, particularly in the Malaysian context.

Third, while experiential learning is widely advocated, there is a gap in context-specific experiential frameworks that authentically incorporate communal traditions like *Kenduri* into classroom and field-based learning environments. Most culinary programs continue to emphasize technical competencies in controlled settings, with limited engagement in real-life cultural practices that embody teamwork, social responsibility, and tacit knowledge transfer. Fourth, there is a limited understanding of implementation challenges, including curriculum constraints, resource availability, institutional support, and the readiness of educators and students to adopt culturally embedded teaching approaches.

Finally, there is a lack of sustainable integration frameworks that ensure traditional practices are not only introduced as one-off activities but are systematically embedded, evaluated, and sustained within academic programs over time. Without such frameworks, efforts to incorporate cultural heritage risk being fragmented, tokenistic, or unsustainable.

To address these gaps, the present study explores the integration of *rewang* practices, a communal cooking tradition deeply rooted in Malay culture, into formal culinary education at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM). Using *Kenduri* traditions as pedagogical tools, this study aims to design and implement a *rewang*-based experiential learning model within a university culinary program. It further evaluates the educational, cultural, professional, and institutional impacts of this approach, while identifying implementation challenges and proposing a sustainable framework for integrating traditional practices into modern culinary education. By examining the experiences of UiTM culinary arts students as both informants and subjects of observation, this study seeks to demonstrate the pedagogical value of indigenous knowledge systems in shaping holistic and culturally grounded culinary professionals.

## Literature Review

This literature review is organized around three key thematic areas relevant to the study. First, it examines experiential learning within culinary education, with particular emphasis on Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory and its application in practice-based learning environments. Second, it explores sociocultural and situated learning perspectives, highlighting the role of community, participation, and context in shaping knowledge acquisition. Third, it discusses Indigenous Knowledge Systems and their contribution to decolonizing culinary education, emphasizing the integration of local cultural practices such as *rewang* into formal academic frameworks.

### *Experiential Learning in Culinary Contexts*

This study is grounded in Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (ELT), which conceptualizes learning as a cyclical and iterative process involving concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation (Kolb, 1984). ELT posits that knowledge is constructed through the transformation of experience into meaningful understanding. In culinary education, this process is particularly salient, as students engage in multisensory, hands-on activities that integrate technical execution with sensory perception and aesthetic judgment (Damsbo-Svendsen et al., 2022; Pan et al., 2025). Furthermore,

collaborative food production enhances this process by promoting teamwork, social interaction, and the co-construction of knowledge and competencies (Zhou et al., 2025).

Within this study, the traditional rewang practice is operationalized as the concrete experience phase, where students actively participate in community-based culinary activities such as preparing food for kenduri feasts. These authentic environments demand coordination, collective responsibility, and adherence to shared cultural norms, thereby extending learning beyond technical skill acquisition. Reflective observation is facilitated through systematic documentation and critical evaluation of participation, enabling students to analyse workflow organization, interpersonal dynamics, and embedded cultural values.

Subsequently, abstract conceptualization allows students to synthesize experiential insights with theoretical constructs related to culinary management, teamwork, leadership, and cultural gastronomy. This stage strengthens analytical reasoning and bridges experiential and academic knowledge. The final phase, active experimentation, is realized as students apply acquired competencies and values in structured academic tasks, practical assessments, and future culinary projects. By embedding rewang within ELT, this study demonstrates how culturally grounded practices can be translated into structured pedagogical frameworks, reinforcing the role of experiential learning in connecting community engagement with formal culinary education.

### ***Sociocultural and Situated Learning***

The Sociocultural Theory of Learning, alongside the concept of Situated Learning, emphasizes that learning is inherently social and context-dependent, occurring through participation in communities of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991; Vygotsky, 1978). From this perspective, knowledge is co-constructed through interaction, shared activities, and engagement in authentic contexts rather than acquired solely through individual cognition.

The rewang tradition exemplifies such a community of practice, where learning unfolds through legitimate peripheral participation. Novices initially engage in basic tasks, such as ingredient preparation or food serving, before progressively assuming more complex roles as their competence develops. While this progression parallels apprenticeship models in professional kitchens, rewang is distinguished by its emphasis on communal cooperation, shared responsibility, and social cohesion rather than hierarchical structures or competition.

Integrating rewang into the UiTM culinary curriculum provides students with an authentic platform for situated learning. Through participation, students internalize tacit knowledge, including communication patterns, implicit norms, and ethical expectations governing communal cooking practices. This process enables learners to develop not only technical proficiency but also a sense of belonging and cultural identity, thereby addressing gaps often present in conventional, classroom-based culinary education.

### ***Indigenous Knowledge and Decolonizing Culinary Education***

A critical dimension of this framework is the incorporation of Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), which recognize local traditions, cultural practices, and oral knowledge as legitimate and valuable forms of learning (Sonia Anil Verma & Khan, 2024). In the Malay cultural context, rewang embodies these principles by emphasizing experiential learning,

intergenerational knowledge transfer, respect for elders, and collective responsibility (Rindang et al., 2025). As a communal practice, it reinforces values of mutual assistance, social solidarity, and shared accountability across generations.

Embedding rewang within formal culinary education creates a meaningful bridge between indigenous and institutional knowledge systems. This integration highlights that culinary practice extends beyond technical and aesthetic dimensions to encompass cultural epistemologies, ethical values, and social identity. Such an approach contributes to the decolonization of culinary education by challenging the dominance of Western-centric frameworks and re-centering local knowledge within academic discourse (Makokotlela & Gumbo, 2025; Ramli et al., 2025).

Moreover, indigenous pedagogies advocate holistic learning that integrates cognitive, affective, and moral dimensions of development (Antoine et al., 2018; Jaiswal, 2025). Through engagement in rewang, students cultivate not only culinary competencies but also essential personal and professional values, including cooperation, patience, empathy, and social responsibility. These attributes are critical for developing ethically grounded and culturally aware culinary professionals.

## **Design and Methodology**

### ***Research Design***

This qualitative study employed an observation-based design grounded in experiential and sociocultural theory. Observation functioned as both a research strategy and pedagogical tool, enabling direct engagement with practices, behaviours, and interactions while generating experiential and reflective insights (Creswell, 2017; Huyler & McGill, 2019). It supports the documentation of nuanced rituals and social dynamics often overlooked in conventional assessments.

Pedagogically, observation promotes reflective practice, including self-reflection on assumptions and biases, transforming learning into a dialogic process between self and community (Loughran, 2002; Moon, 2009; Schon, 1983). Within UiTM's culinary program, students documented field notes, photographs, and reflective journals during rewang and kenduri activities, allowing assessment of outcomes such as teamwork, cultural competence, and ethical awareness.

### ***Context and Participants***

The study was conducted at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM), Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, involving culinary arts students as both participants and observational subjects.

### ***Innovation Implementation***

Rewang activities were embedded into coursework through planning and executing kenduri events, assigning communal roles, coordinating logistics and hygiene, and engaging local community members.

### ***Data Collection and Analysis***

Data were collected through observation, field notes, reflective journals, and lecturer documentation, ensuring comprehensive coverage of the learning context. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns across four domains: educational, cultural, professional, and institutional. This approach enabled a nuanced, triangulated understanding of teaching and learning dynamics, capturing both opportunities and challenges.

### **Findings and Discussion**

#### ***Impact and Outcomes***

The integration of rewang into culinary education represents an innovative approach that bridges traditional community-based practices with formal academic training. Involving UiTM culinary students as both participants and observational subjects, the study demonstrated how rewang, as a communal food preparation practice, supports experiential learning through kenduri organization.

Students engaged in real-world problem-solving and large-scale coordination, while reflective processes aligned with Kolb's learning cycle facilitated the integration of theory and practice (Kolb, 1984). Collaborative participation strengthened soft skills such as leadership, communication, and adaptability, while observation-based assessment enabled holistic evaluation beyond technical competencies.

#### ***Cultural and Heritage Impact***

The initiative revitalized Malay culinary heritage by positioning rewang as a form of cultural expression rather than solely technical practice (Mathew, 2024). Students engaged with intangible cultural heritage through hands-on learning, gaining access to oral traditions and tacit knowledge via interactions with community elders (Alghamdi et al., 2023).



**Figure 1: The Rewang Culture Adapt by Culinary Student**

This process reinforced respect for cultural custodians and supported intergenerational knowledge transfer. Furthermore, integrating rewang into formal education contributes to decolonizing culinary curricula by validating indigenous epistemologies and challenging Eurocentric frameworks (Hinton & Carodenuto, 2025). As a result, students developed cultural literacy, ethical awareness, and a stronger sense of identity.

## *Social and Community Engagement*

University–community collaboration enhanced students’ civic responsibility, positioning them as active contributors to their communities (Rahman et al., 2025). Participation in rewang fostered values of cooperation, shared accountability, and ethical engagement.



**Figure 2: Activities That Involve the Community – Student Prepared and Served The Food In Rewang Environments For The Kenduri**

The initiative also promoted inclusivity and intercultural dialogue, enabling students from diverse backgrounds to collaborate and develop empathy and cultural sensitivity. These experiences strengthened social cohesion and demonstrated the role of culturally grounded pedagogy in cultivating socially responsible graduates (Sathorar & Geduld, 2021).

### *Student Learning Outcomes*

Findings indicate that rewang participation generated holistic learning outcomes across multiple domains. Cognitively, students developed deeper understanding of traditional cooking processes, event management, and cultural meanings (Mathew, 2024). Affective outcomes included enhanced empathy, cultural pride, and social awareness (Alghamdi et al., 2023).

Psychomotor skills improved through hands-on large-scale food preparation, while interpersonal competencies such as teamwork and communication were strengthened. Reflectively, students demonstrated increased self-awareness and critical understanding of culinary practices. Collectively, these outcomes highlight the effectiveness of culturally grounded experiential learning in producing well-rounded culinary professionals (Hinton & Carodenuto, 2025; Rahman et al., 2025).

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. All procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Research Ethic Committee, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM, approval number FPHP/FREC/892/2025. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

The rewang-based approach provided practical exposure aligned with industry demands, particularly in large-scale food production, logistics, hygiene management, and team coordination. Students gained confidence in handling real-world catering scenarios, effectively bridging theoretical knowledge and professional practice.

The experience also fostered entrepreneurial awareness, inspiring interest in heritage-based food businesses and cultural gastronomy. Additionally, rewang practices promoted sustainability through waste minimization, resource sharing, and local sourcing, reinforcing ethical and responsible culinary practices aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (United Nations, 2024).

## **Conclusion**

The integration of rewang practices into culinary education at Universiti Teknologi MARA presents a scalable and innovative teaching model that effectively bridges traditional cultural practices with contemporary pedagogy. Embedding rewang within the curriculum enhances experiential learning by engaging students in hands-on, collaborative activities that develop technical competencies alongside cultural awareness. Beyond skill acquisition, the initiative strengthens students' cultural identity by connecting them with Malay culinary heritage and its associated social rituals, reinforcing the relevance of tradition in modern professional contexts. It also promotes meaningful community engagement through collaboration with local elders, facilitating intergenerational knowledge transfer and fostering civic responsibility.

Furthermore, participation in rewang cultivates key professional competencies, including teamwork, project management, and problem-solving, aligning cultural learning with employability outcomes. By institutionalizing culturally grounded experiential models, higher education can simultaneously preserve intangible cultural heritage and produce globally competitive, culturally literate, and socially responsible graduates.

Ultimately, the rewang framework demonstrates that culinary practice extends beyond technical execution, functioning as a cultural expression, social ritual, and pedagogical resource that supports more inclusive and socially responsive education (Mathew, 2024; Rahman et al., 2025).

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**Acknowledgements:** The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) for providing the necessary resources and support throughout the course of this research. Special appreciation is extended to colleagues and peers who contributed valuable insights and constructive feedback, which greatly enhanced the quality of this paper.

**Funding Statement:** No Funding

**Conflict of Interest Statement:** The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper. All authors have contributed to this work and approved the final version of the manuscript for submission to the International Journal of Modern Education (IJMOE).

**Ethics Statement:** This study was conducted in accordance with ethical research standards. All procedures involving human participants were reviewed and approved by the Research Ethic Committee, Faculty of Hotel and Tourism Management, UiTM, approval number FPHP/FREC/892/2025. Informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were assured of confidentiality and anonymity. The data collected were used solely for academic purposes.

**Author Contribution Statement:** All authors contributed significantly to the development of this manuscript. Mohd Shazali Md Sharif was responsible for the conceptualization, methodology, and overall supervision of the study. Wan Ahmad Hasni Wan Zulkifali handled data collection, analysis, and interpretation of results. Aslinda Mohd Shahril and Norhidayah Abdullah contributed to the literature review, drafting, and critical revision of the manuscript. All authors read and approved the final version of the manuscript prior to submission.

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