

Gastrodiplomacy as a Cultural Soft Power Strategy: Exploring Indonesian MSME Entrepreneurs' Perspectives and Vocational Skill Development Needs

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Abstract

This study investigates Indonesian Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprise (MSME) entrepreneurs' perceptions of gastrodiplomacy as a cultural soft power strategy and identifies vocational skill development needs to enhance their participation in culinary cultural diplomacy. Despite Indonesia's rich culinary heritage, limited awareness and capacity constraints hinder MSMEs from leveraging gastrodiplomacy to penetrate international markets. Employing a mixed-methods approach with 22 culinary MSME entrepreneurs in Garut Regency, West Java, this preliminary study utilized structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews analyzed through descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. Findings reveal a paradox: while only 31.8% of respondents were familiar with gastrodiplomacy concepts, 77.3% expressed strong interest in learning, and 100% recognized the need for specialized vocational training. Despite low conceptual awareness, 54.5% already engaged in intuitive cultural promotion activities through social media and local collaborations. Key barriers include complex export regulations (68.2%), limited market information (63.6%), and high costs (59.1%). Comparative analysis with successful gastrodiplomacy programs in Thailand ("Kitchen of the World") and South Korea ("Hansik Globalization") highlights the potential for Indonesia to systematically leverage its culinary diversity. The study proposes a comprehensive vocational skill model integrating gastrodiplomacy theory, digital marketing competencies, export navigation, and cultural branding strategies. These findings provide empirical foundation for policy interventions supporting MSME capacity building in gastrodiplomacy, contributing to national soft power enhancement and sustainable economic development through cultural diplomacy.

1. Introduction

Indonesia possesses extraordinary culinary diversity, characterized by distinctive regional cuisines that reflect the archipelago's rich cultural tapestry. This gastronomic variety emerges from complex interactions between cultural backgrounds, geographical conditions, and local customary systems across Indonesia's diverse regions (Benu et al., 2025). Despite this remarkable culinary heritage, Indonesian cuisine remains relatively unknown internationally, representing a significant missed opportunity for cultural promotion and economic development (Dongmo et al., 2024).

The concept of gastronomy has become integral to contemporary food and beverage industry development in Indonesia, with growing recognition of its importance for sustainability and cultural preservation (Mutlu & Doğan, 2021). Derived from the Greek words *gastér* (stomach) and *nomos* (law or rule), gastronomy encompasses the interdisciplinary study of relationships between food, culture, art, and culinary skills (Ningrum et al., 2021; Rizqiyah & Anshori, 2024; Afifah et al., 2025). Modern gastronomy extends beyond cooking techniques to encompass historical, sociological, anthropological, and aesthetic dimensions of food practices (Montanari, 2006, 2019).

Contemporary gastronomy manifests across multiple dimensions: cultural gastronomy examines how food reflects societal values, traditions, and group identity (Koerich & Müller, 2022; Song & Kim, 2022; Gündüz et al., 2024); social gastronomy analyzes food's role in building social relationships (Navarro-Dols & González-Pernía, 2020; Damasceno et al., 2023); aesthetic gastronomy evaluates beauty and creativity in food presentation, including fine dining and plating artistry (Schifferstein et al., 2022); molecular gastronomy integrates chemistry and physics in cooking processes to create innovative culinary techniques (Onurlar, 2023); eco-gastronomy incorporates ecological principles emphasizing relationships between food, environment, and social responsibility (Elsehely & Elsayed, 2024); and digital gastronomy leverages technology to enhance culinary experiences through applications and online platforms (Jeannot et al., 2022).

Gastronomy has emerged as a significant attraction in tourism contexts. Gastronomic tourism involves cultural exploration through authentic culinary experiences unique to specific destinations. According to the World Tourism Organization (UNWTO), culinary tourism represents one of the fastest-growing sectors, as travelers increasingly seek authentic gastronomic experiences alongside traditional natural and cultural attractions (Pratista et al., 2020; Wijaya et al., 2021; Sari et al., 2022; Setyawati, 2024). Research demonstrates gastronomy's crucial role in the development of the tourism industry, particularly in enhancing visitor experiences and encouraging return visits. Prasetyo et al. (2024) found that local food-based culinary tourism experiences significantly increased tourist satisfaction and intentions to return and recommend destinations. Similarly, Wibowo (2023) emphasized that integrating local cuisine into tourism creates economic and social benefits, especially in the digital 4.0 era, where enhanced digital infrastructure and online marketing increase local culinary visibility and attract more tourists.

1.1 Gastrodiplomacy as Cultural Soft Power

The strategic use of cuisine for cultural diplomacy, termed gastrodiplomacy, represents a sophisticated approach to international relations rooted in soft power theory. Nye (2004, 2021) conceptualized soft power as the ability to shape preferences of others through appeal and attraction rather than coercion, distinguishing it from hard power's reliance on military or economic force. Cultural diplomacy, as a manifestation of soft power, employs cultural resources, including cuisine—to build mutual understanding, influence perceptions, and foster favorable international relations (Melissen, 2005; Ang et al., 2015). Gastrodiplomacy combines "gastronomy" and "diplomacy" to encompass broader objectives beyond simple cultural introduction (Rockower, 2012). This approach provides insights into national culture, positioning food as a cultural symbol that enhances the national image (Eser & Karaosmanoğlu, 2024). As gastronomy expert Rockower (2012) noted, "the best way to win hearts and minds is through the stomach," suggesting Indonesia's culinary diversity could serve as a powerful tool for international recognition and image enhancement.

1.2 International Gastrodiplomacy Initiatives: Comparative Perspectives

Examining successful gastrodiplomacy programs provides valuable insights for Indonesia's strategic development. Thailand's "Global Thai" (later "Kitchen of the World") program, launched in 2002, exemplifies the systematic implementation of gastrodiplomacy. The Thai government provided financial incentives, culinary training, and branding support to establish Thai restaurants worldwide, resulting in exponential growth from approximately 5,500 Thai restaurants globally in 2002 to over 15,000 by 2012 (Wilson, 2013; Chapple-Sokol, 2013). This program strategically positioned Thai cuisine as accessible, healthy, and culturally rich, significantly enhancing Thailand's international image and tourism appeal.

Similarly, South Korea's "Korean Cuisine to the World" (Hansik Globalization) initiative, launched in 2009 with substantial government investment (approximately \$77 million over five years), aimed to elevate Korean cuisine

to global prominence alongside Chinese, Japanese, and Western cuisines (Kim & Kim, 2021). The program integrated cultural content (K-pop, K-drama) with culinary promotion, established Korean Cultural Centers offering cooking classes, and standardized Korean restaurant quality worldwide. Suktarachan and Thammachai (2025) demonstrated how Korean restaurant names themselves function as soft power tools, communicating cultural identity and authenticity.

These comparative cases reveal common success factors: (1) sustained government commitment and funding; (2) integration with broader cultural diplomacy strategies; (3) quality standardization and training systems; (4) private-public sector collaboration; and (5) strategic use of diaspora communities. Indonesia, despite comparable culinary richness, lacks such a systematic, nationally coordinated gastrodiploamacy infrastructure, representing both a challenge and a significant opportunity for strategic development (Ana et al., 2025).

Despite gastrodiploamacy's potential, Indonesia lacks focused gastrodiploamacy development programs, resulting in limited international awareness and appreciation of Indonesian cuisine. Successful gastrodiploamacy examples include the proliferation of Korean and Thai restaurants globally, which have enhanced international understanding of these cultures (Suktarachan & Thammachai, 2025). Contrary to popular perception that gastrodiploamacy requires diplomatic or political expertise, it can be effectively implemented by various actors including international companies, governments, civil society organizations, individuals, and notably, the MSME sector (Ana et al., 2025). Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) play crucial roles in national economic development through resource absorption and local employment creation, helping governments generate employment opportunities (Meilariza & Delima, 2024). However, Indonesian culinary MSMEs face multiple challenges in international market penetration, including regulatory complexity, limited access to market information, financial constraints, and insufficient understanding of gastrodiploamacy as a strategic tool (Ana et al., 2025). These barriers necessitate targeted vocational education interventions to build MSME capacity in cultural diplomacy competencies.

1.3 Research Objectives and Questions

Given this context, this study investigates how Indonesian culinary MSME entrepreneurs, particularly in Garut Regency, West Java, perceive the importance of gastrodiploamacy and its implications for developing vocational skill models to enhance Indonesia's culinary international image. Specifically, this preliminary study addresses three interconnected research questions:

- RQ1: How do Indonesian MSME entrepreneurs in the culinary sector perceive gastrodiploamacy as a cultural soft power strategy, and what is their current level of awareness regarding gastrodiploamacy concepts?
- RQ2: What specific vocational skills, competencies, and training needs exist among culinary MSMEs to enhance their participation in gastrodiploamacy initiatives and international market penetration?
- RQ3: What are the primary barriers and enabling factors for integrating gastrodiploamacy principles into Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) curricula for culinary MSMEs in Indonesia?

These questions emerged from identified gaps between Indonesia's significant culinary heritage and limited international recognition, necessitating systematic investigation of MSME readiness, capacity needs, and educational interventions required to leverage gastrodiploamacy as both a cultural diplomacy tool and economic development strategy

2. Method

This study employed a sequential mixed-methods design combining descriptive quantitative and qualitative approaches to understand authentic information within the research context (Lim, 2024). The mixed-methods approach was selected to provide both breadth (through quantitative survey data) and depth (through qualitative insights) in understanding MSME entrepreneurs' perspectives on gastrodiploamacy (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). As a preliminary exploratory study, this research aimed to describe current phenomena and establish a foundational understanding for future large-scale investigations (Adji, 2024). Purposive sampling was utilised to select informants based on specific considerations, including expertise, knowledge, or positions relevant to the research objectives. This technique enables researchers to access information relevant to the social objects or situations under investigation (Ahmed, 2024). As a descriptive study, this research aimed to describe phenomena occurring currently or in the past (Adji, 2024). Data collection utilised survey techniques with questionnaire instruments distributed to MSME entrepreneurs. The research workflow is presented in Figure 1.

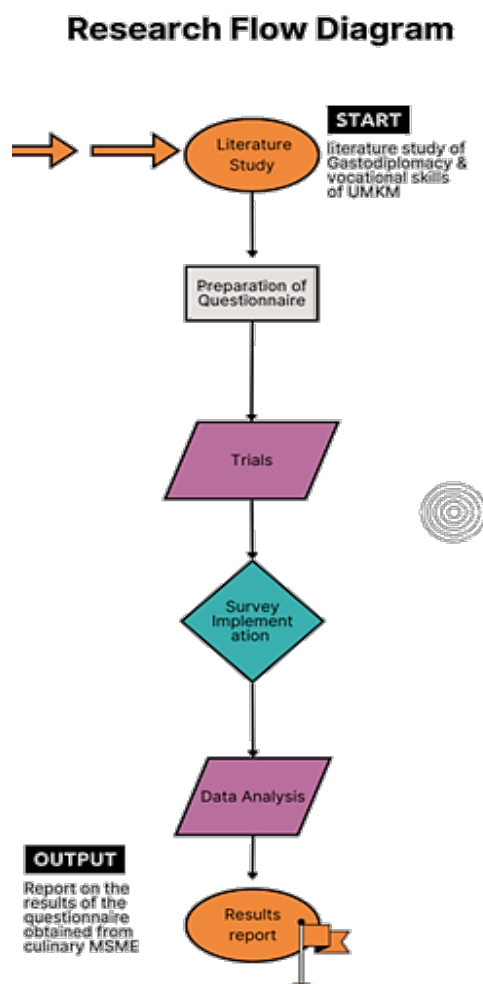


Fig. 1 The research workflow

The research process followed six systematic stages: **Literature Study**: Initial stage involving comprehensive literature review on gastrodiploacy concepts and vocational skill development among culinary MSME entrepreneurs to establish theoretical foundations and identify research gaps. **Questionnaire Preparation**: Based on literature review findings, researchers developed relevant questionnaires to gather data from culinary MSME entrepreneurs. **Trials**: Questionnaires underwent small-scale testing to ensure instrument validity and reliability before wider implementation. **Survey Implementation**: After testing, questionnaires were distributed to MSME entrepreneur respondents to collect necessary field data. **Data Analysis**: Survey data underwent qualitative and/or quantitative analysis to identify relationships between gastrodiploacy, vocational skills, and MSME development. **Results Report**: Final stage involved compiling research findings that included key discoveries from this preliminary study, forming the foundation for future research.

2.1 Research Setting and Context

The study was conducted in Garut Regency, West Java Province, Indonesia, selected for its distinctive culinary heritage and robust MSME ecosystem. Garut is renowned for traditional products including dodol, kerupuk, and banana-based snacks representing authentic Indonesian flavors with significant cultural value. The region's strategic location in West Java Indonesia's most populous province with significant economic activity and rich culinary traditions make it an ideal setting for investigating gastrodiploacy potential among MSMEs within the broader Indonesian governmental context of strengthening national soft power through cultural diplomacy.

2.2 Sampling Strategy and Participant Selection

Purposive sampling with maximum variation was employed to select participants based on predetermined criteria ensuring research relevance (Ahmed, 2024). Selection criteria included: (1) ownership/management of active culinary MSMEs in Garut Regency; (2) minimum one year business operation; (3) production/marketing of traditional Indonesian foods; (4) willingness to participate voluntarily; and (5) effective Indonesian

communication ability. The sample size of twenty-two participants was determined based on several considerations: (a) preliminary study scope prioritising depth over breadth; (b) achievement of theoretical saturation in qualitative responses; (c) manageable scope for comprehensive analysis; and (d) representation of various culinary subsectors, business durations, and operational scales. While acknowledging this limitation, Patton (2015) argues that purposive sampling in qualitative research prioritises information richness over statistical generalizability, making smaller samples appropriate for exploratory investigations.

2.3 Data Collection Procedures

Data collection utilised structured survey questionnaires supplemented by informal interviews. The questionnaire was developed through literature review, expert consultation, pilot testing with five MSMEs, and refinement based on feedback. The instrument comprised six sections: demographic/business characteristics, gastronomy/gastrodiplomacy awareness, cultural promotion activities, perceived benefits, international market challenges, and vocational skill needs. Questions included both closed-ended quantitative items and open-ended qualitative items. Data collection occurred over six weeks (March-April 2025) using face-to-face administration and telephone interviews where needed.

2.4 Data Collection Instruments and Validation

The questionnaire underwent rigorous validation through expert panel review involving three academics (gastronomy, vocational education, MSME development specialists) and two industry practitioners. Content validity assessment resulted in the modification of twelve items and the addition of four new items. Construct validity was evaluated through pilot testing with five MSME entrepreneurs not included in the main study, followed by item analysis and refinement. Reliability assessment showed acceptable internal consistency with Cronbach's alpha coefficients ranging from 0.72 to 0.89 across different constructs, ensuring instrument appropriateness for reliable data capture.

2.5 Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis employed a sequential mixed-method approach. Quantitative data underwent descriptive statistical analysis using SPSS version 28.0, calculating frequencies, percentages, and means to identify patterns in awareness levels, perceived benefits, and challenges. Qualitative data from open-ended responses and interviews were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase thematic analysis framework: (1) familiarization with data through repeated reading; (2) generation of initial codes; (3) identification of potential themes; (4) review and refinement of themes; (5) definition and naming of themes; and (6) production of the final report. Two researchers independently conducted initial coding to enhance reliability, with discrepancies resolved through consensus-building discussions (Nowell et al., 2017). Integration of quantitative and qualitative findings occurred during interpretation, where statistical patterns were enriched through qualitative insights, providing a comprehensive understanding through methodological triangulation.

2.6 Study Limitations and Delimitations

This study acknowledges several limitations. First, the geographic scope is limited to Garut Regency, West Java, which may not represent Indonesia's culinary diversity across other regions (e.g., Bali, Sumatra, Sulawesi) with distinct gastronomic traditions. Second, the sample size ($n=22$) restricts statistical generalizability, though it provides sufficient depth for exploratory qualitative investigation. Third, the cross-sectional design captures perspectives at a single time point, limiting understanding of how perceptions evolve over time. Fourth, the self-reported nature of survey data may introduce response bias. These limitations are deliberate delimitations of a preliminary study. The focus on Garut enables in-depth contextual analysis, the purposive sample prioritises information quality over quantity, and the exploratory approach establishes foundations for future large-scale, multi-regional longitudinal research. Future studies should expand geographically, increase sample sizes, employ comparative designs, and implement longitudinal assessments to validate and extend these findings.

3. Result And Discussion

This section presents findings organized thematically, integrating quantitative survey results with qualitative insights from participant responses. The discussion contextualises findings within existing literature and comparative international gastrodiplomacy frameworks. MSMEs are businesses owned by individuals or business entities that meet the criteria established by Law No. 20 of 2008 concerning Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises. Data from Garut Regency demonstrates that post-economic crisis, MSME numbers have consistently increased rather than decreased.

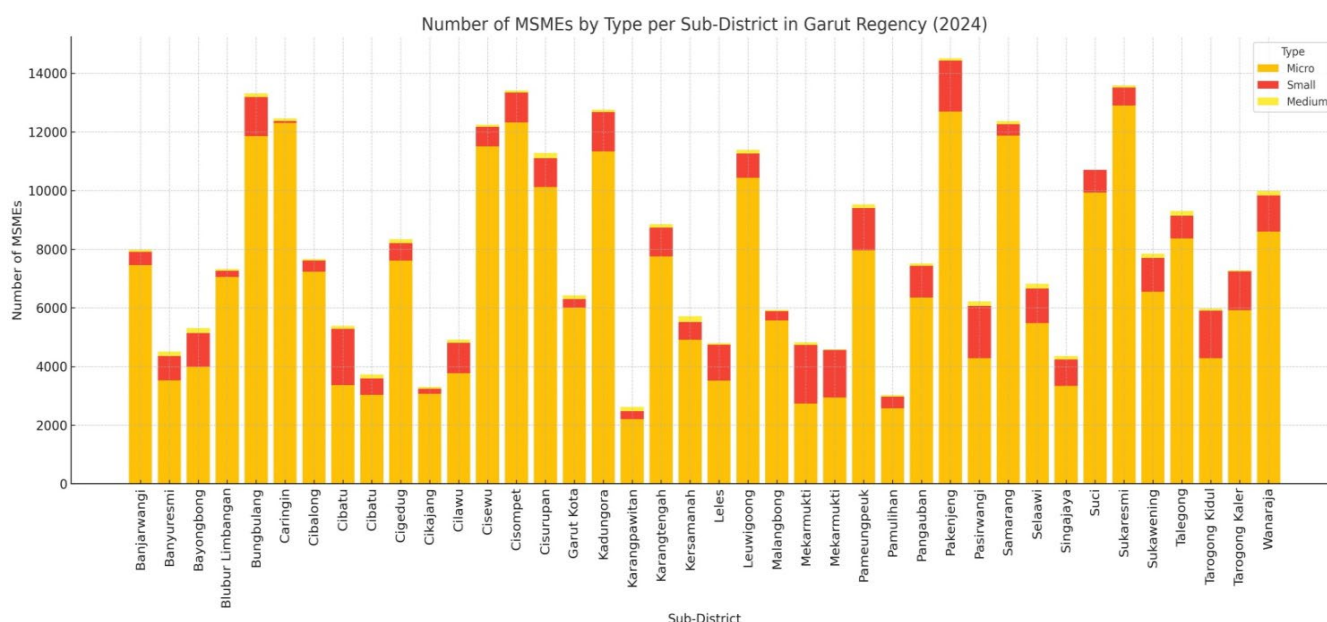


Fig. 2 Number of micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) by type per sub-district in Garut Regency, 2024

Source: <https://satudata.garutkab.go.id/>

Figure 2 illustrates MSME distribution by type (micro, small, and medium) across sub-districts in Garut Regency for 2024. This data provides initial insights into the distribution and dominance of MSME entrepreneurs who constitute the primary target for this preliminary study on Indonesian culinary gastrodiplomacy and vocational skill development.

Key findings include: (1) Micro MSME Dominance: Nearly all sub-districts show significantly higher numbers of micro MSMEs compared to small and medium enterprises, confirming micro-enterprises as the primary force in Garut's MSME ecosystem and thus the main focus for capacity building and vocational training programs; (2) Uneven Distribution: Certain sub-districts such as Garut City, Tarogong Kidul, and Tarogong Kaler demonstrate substantially higher MSME numbers compared to others, potentially serving as primary centers for culinary gastrodiplomacy program development due to high MSME economic activity; (3) Gastrodiplomacy Program Intervention Opportunities: With large numbers of culinary MSMEs, vocational skill training programs integrated with gastrodiplomacy strategies can be more easily disseminated and implemented in areas with high entrepreneur density.

3.1 Respondent Characteristics

This study involved 22 MSME entrepreneurs in Garut Regency, West Java. Respondent demographic characteristics demonstrate representative distribution from the region's culinary MSME ecosystem, as presented in Table 1.

Table 1 Respondent demographic characteristics

Characteristic	Category	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Business Type	Snacks/Souvenirs	17	77.3
	Café	1	4.5
	Others	4	18.2
Business Duration	< 1 year	3	13.6
	1-3 years	5	22.7
	3-5 years	2	9.1
	> 5 years	12	54.5
Business Location	Garut Regency	20	90.9
	Garut + Outside Regency	2	9.1
Total		22	100.0

By business type, the majority of respondents (77.3%; n=17) operate in snacks and souvenirs, while others include cafés (4.5%; n=1) and other businesses (18.2%; n=4). This dominance of snacks and souvenirs reflects Garut's local economic characteristics, renowned for distinctive food products such as Garut dodol, banana chips, and various traditional crackers.

Regarding business experience, data shows most respondents (54.5%; n=12) have operated for over 5 years, followed by those with 1-3 years of experience (22.7%; n=5), and less than 1 year (13.6%; n=3). This distribution indicates that most respondents possess mature business experience and have survived the critical early phases of MSME development, aligning with Meilariza and Delima's (2024) findings that MSMEs that survive beyond 5 years typically have more stable business foundations and are better prepared for market expansion. All respondents (100%; n=22) are in Garut Regency, with 90.9% (n=20) operating exclusively within the regency and 9.1% (n=2) extending beyond Garut Regency. This geographical concentration provides research advantages by enabling focused analysis of specific conditions affecting culinary MSMEs within a single administrative area.

3.2 Gastronomy and Gastrodiplomacy Awareness and Understanding

3.2.1 Gastronomy Awareness

Research findings indicate relatively low awareness among MSME entrepreneurs of "gastronomy" terminology, as shown in Table 2. Only 40.9% (n=9) of respondents had heard of gastronomy, while 59.1% (n=13) were unfamiliar with the concept.

Table 2 *Gastronomy and gastrodiplomacy awareness and interest levels*

Aspect	Category	Count (n)	Percentage (%)
Gastronomy Awareness	Yes	9	40.9
	No	13	59.1
Gastrodiplomacy Awareness	Yes	7	31.8
	No	15	68.2
Interest in Learning Gastrodiplomacy	Very Interested	17	77.3
	Interested	5	22.7
	Not Interested	0	0.0

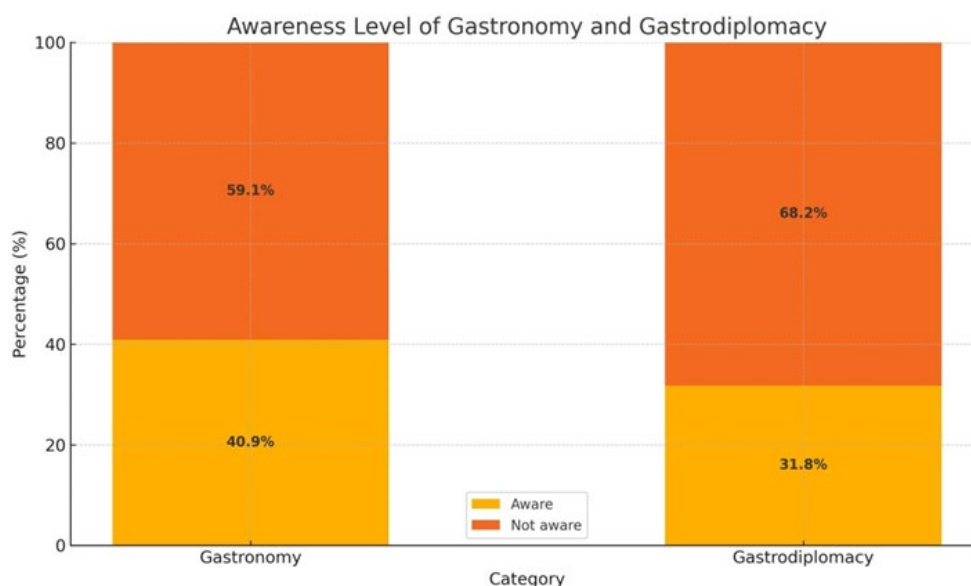


Fig. 3 *Comparison of awareness levels of gastronomy and gastrodiplomacy*

These findings indicate significant knowledge gaps among MSME entrepreneurs, despite their practical implementation of gastronomic principles in business activities. Low gastronomy awareness may relate to limited information access and formal education in the MSME sector. As Firmani et al. (2018) noted, gastronomy as an

interdisciplinary field requires comprehensive understanding of cultural, historical, and food science aspects often not integrated into conventional MSME training. This finding aligns with broader challenges in TVET systems where theoretical knowledge often remains disconnected from practical entrepreneurial contexts (UNESCO, 2023).

3.2.2 Gastrodiplomacy Awareness

Gastrodiplomacy awareness showed even lower results compared to gastronomy. Only 31.8% (n=7) of respondents had heard of gastrodiplomacy, while 68.2% (n=15) were unfamiliar with the concept. These results confirm Ana et al.'s (2025) findings that gastrodiplomacy concepts remain relatively new among Indonesian MSME entrepreneurs, despite unconscious implementation of gastrodiplomacy-supporting practices.

Notably, despite low awareness, interest in learning gastrodiplomacy was exceptionally high. A substantial 77.3% (n=17) of respondents expressed being "very interested" in learning gastrodiplomacy, while 22.7% (n=5) stated they were "interested." No respondents expressed disinterest, indicating significant potential for developing gastrodiplomacy education programs among MSMEs.

3.2.3 Conceptual Understanding and The Awareness-Interest Paradox

Qualitative analysis of respondents' understanding regarding gastrodiplomacy revealed that most respondents possessed limited conceptual understanding. Responses such as "don't know anything," "don't understand," and "no idea" dominated, underscoring the need for systematic educational interventions to build a solid conceptual understanding before implementing gastrodiplomacy programs. This study reveals a fascinating paradox: while only 31.8% of respondents were familiar with gastrodiplomacy terminology, 77.3% expressed strong interest in learning about it, and 100% recognized its importance for MSME development.

This awareness-interest gap suggests that brief exposure to gastrodiplomacy concepts (even through research questionnaires) triggers immediate recognition of its relevance among practitioners. As Rockower (2012) noted, gastrodiplomacy's intuitive appeal—leveraging universally appreciated food culture to achieve economic and diplomatic gains—resonates strongly with entrepreneurs seeking competitive advantage. This finding has significant implications for TVET curriculum design: the high receptivity suggests that relatively brief, well-designed educational interventions could rapidly translate latent awareness into actionable competencies.

3.3 Cultural Promotion Activities Through Food

Despite limited conceptual understanding of gastrodiplomacy, data shows 54.5% (n=12) of respondents had engaged in activities related to cultural promotion through food. The most common activities included promotion through social media networks and collaboration with other MSMEs. These findings indicate MSME entrepreneurs intuitively implementing gastrodiplomacy elements without recognizing their theoretical context—a phenomenon Kim and Kim (2021) term "unconscious cultural diplomacy," where grassroots actors engage in soft power practices without formal diplomatic frameworks. Promotion activities conducted by respondents included: social media use to introduce traditional products, collaboration with other MSMEs in culinary events, and participation in local cultural activities. This pattern aligns with Wibowo's (2023) findings emphasizing the importance of digital technology integration in local culinary promotion to reach broader audiences. For the 45.5% (n=10) of respondents not yet conducting cultural promotion activities, primary reasons cited included lack of knowledge about cultural promotion through food methods and resource limitations. This reinforces arguments for the necessity of capacity building and specialized training to support gastrodiplomacy implementation at the MSME level.

3.4 Perceived Benefits and Importance of Gastrodiplomacy

3.4.1 Branding and Popularity Benefits

Respondents demonstrated highly positive perceptions regarding gastrodiplomacy benefits for business branding and popularity development, as presented in Figure 4.

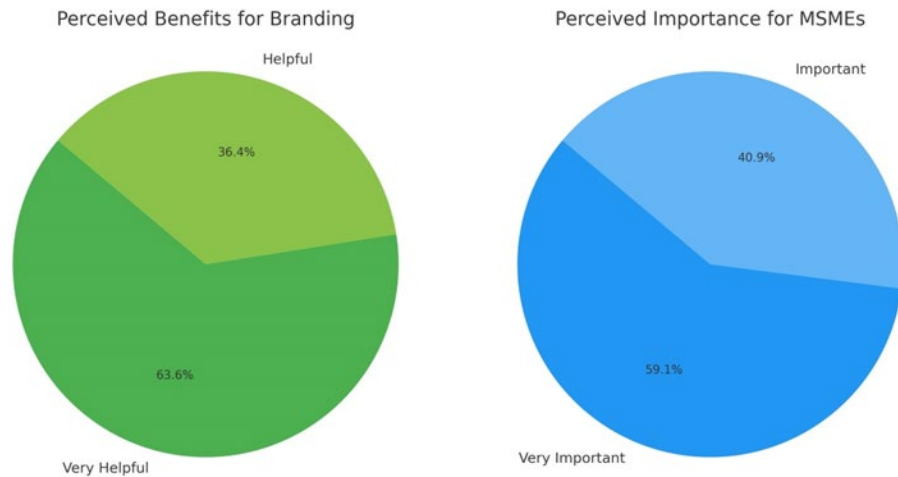


Fig. 4 Perception of the benefits of gastrodiplomacy for branding and its importance for MSMEs

Figure 4 shows that a substantial 63.6% (n=14) of respondents stated that cultural promotion activities through food were "very helpful" for improving branding, while 36.4% (n=8) found them "helpful." No respondents expressed skepticism regarding these benefits. These positive perceptions indicate that MSME entrepreneurs possess good business intuition in recognising gastrodiplomacy's potential as an effective marketing strategy. As Rockower (2012) noted, gastrodiplomacy has unique capabilities to "win hearts and minds through the stomach," which, in business contexts, can translate into powerful branding strategies.

3.4.2 Importance of Gastrodiplomacy for MSME Development

Research findings demonstrate a strong consensus on the importance of gastrodiplomacy for food MSME development. A substantial 59.1% (n=13) of respondents consider gastrodiplomacy "very important," while 40.9% (n=9) consider it "important." No respondents viewed gastrodiplomacy as unimportant, indicating universal awareness of its strategic potential. This high perception of gastrodiplomacy's importance contrasts with low initial awareness, indicating that after exposure to gastrodiplomacy concepts (through research questionnaires), MSME entrepreneurs quickly recognised its relevance and potential for business development.

3.5 International Market Entry Challenges

Analysis of barriers faced by MSME entrepreneurs in entering international markets revealed five primary challenges, as presented in Figure 5.

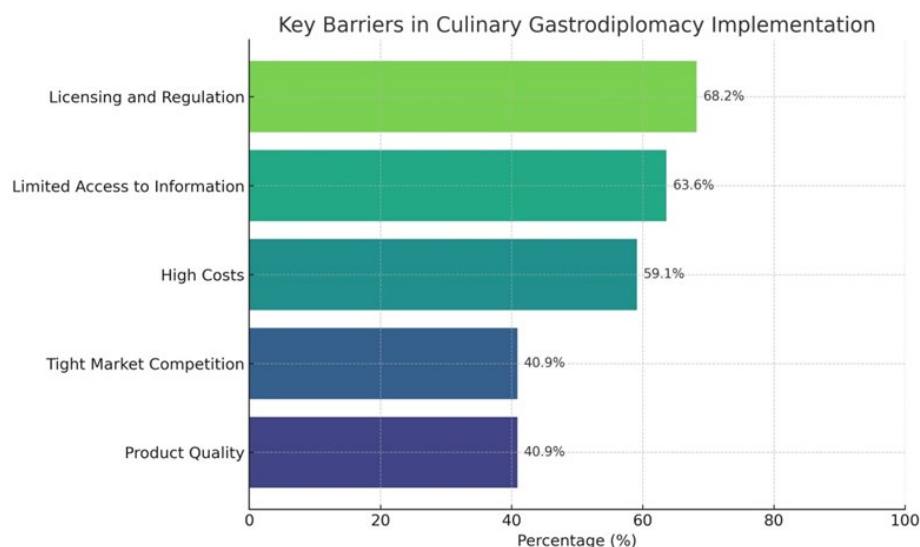


Fig. 5 Challenges faced by MSMEs in entering the international market

Based on Figure 5 regarding the Distribution of Challenges in Entering the International Market, it can be concluded that: Licensing and Regulations (68.2%; n=15): The greatest challenge identified was export licensing and regulatory system complexity, reflecting structural weaknesses in Indonesia's MSME ecosystem requiring policy intervention. Limited Information (63.6%; n=14): Lack of access to international market information represents a significant barrier, indicating the need for more accessible information systems for MSMEs. High Costs (59.1%; n=13): Financial limitations for export investment reflect common MSME characteristics of limited capital. Intense Competition (40.9%; n=9): International market competition is considered a significant challenge, indicating the need for strong differentiation strategies. Product Quality (40.9%; n=9): Concerns about international quality standards demonstrate the need for production capacity enhancement and quality control.

These challenge patterns align with existing literature on MSME export barriers in developing countries, strengthening arguments for holistic approaches in gastrodiplomacy capacity development. Comparative analysis with Thailand and South Korea reveals that both countries addressed these exact barriers through coordinated government interventions: Thailand's Global Thai program provided regulatory facilitation, financial incentives, and market information systems (Wilson, 2013), while South Korea's Hansik initiative offered quality certification, international marketing support, and standardized training (Kim & Kim, 2021). Indonesia could adapt these models to address identified barriers systematically.

3.6 Vocational Skill Model Development Needs

One of the most significant findings was universal consensus (100%; n=22) among respondents regarding the need for developing culinary gastrodiplomacy vocational skill models for MSME entrepreneurs. This total consensus indicates genuine needs felt by business practitioners for specialized gastrodiplomacy training. This need can be understood in the context of gaps between perceived potential and actual capacity. While MSME entrepreneurs recognize gastrodiplomacy's importance and potential benefits, they acknowledge knowledge and skill limitations for effective implementation.

These findings provide empirical validation for research objectives and strengthen arguments for developing vocational training programs specific to MSME gastrodiplomacy. Drawing from successful international models and participant feedback, a comprehensive TVET curriculum should include: 1) Conceptual Foundations Module: Understanding gastrodiplomacy and soft power theory; Indonesian culinary heritage and cultural narratives; food's role in international relations and nation branding. 2) Cultural Promotion Techniques Module: Storytelling and narrative development for culinary products; cultural authenticity vs. adaptation for international markets; leveraging local ingredients and traditional cooking methods as differentiation. 3) Digital Marketing and Branding Module: Social media strategies specific to culinary businesses; visual content creation and food photography; building online communities and engaging international audiences; e-commerce platforms for culinary products. 4) Export Regulation and Compliance Module: Navigation of Indonesian export regulations and documentation; understanding international food safety standards (HACCP, ISO); halal certification and its strategic value in global markets. 5) International Partnership Development Module: Networking strategies with international distributors and retailers; collaboration with Indonesian diaspora communities; participation in international food exhibitions and cultural events. 6) Quality Management and Standardisation Module: Maintaining traditional authenticity while meeting international standards; packaging design integrating cultural elements; shelf-life management for international distribution.

3.7 Government Initiative Support and Indonesian Potential

Respondents demonstrated very strong support for government initiatives using food as an international diplomacy tool. A substantial 50.0% (n=11) expressed "strong support," 45.5% (n=10) "support," and only 4.5% (n=1) remained neutral. No respondents opposed such initiatives.

This high support indicates alignment between MSME entrepreneurs' aspirations and government policy agendas, creating conducive conditions for implementing gastrodiplomacy programs that leverage synergy between the government and private sectors.

More encouragingly, all respondents (100%; n=22) believe Indonesia has the capability to utilise gastrodiplomacy to enhance its international image and relations. This universal confidence reflects pride in Indonesia's culinary wealth and optimism regarding national gastrodiplomacy development potential.

3.8 Promotion Strategies and Brand Awareness Factors

Analysis of promotion strategies proposed by respondents revealed strong preferences for social media and digital technology utilization. Respondents identified social media as the primary platform for international promotion, followed by international exhibition participation and strong branding development. Factors considered important for enhancing brand awareness include: 1) Branding Strategy - identified as the most crucial factor. 2) Attractive Packaging - important for product visual appeal. 3) Repeated Advertising - for building

recognition. 4) Sales Promotion - as purchase incentives. 5) Food Exhibitions - for direct exposure. These preferences demonstrate MSME entrepreneurs' intuitive understanding of the importance of the integrated marketing approach in gastrodiploacy.

3.9 Food Influence on Travel Decisions

The majority of respondents (68.2%; n=15) stated that food has "large" or "very large" influence on their decisions to visit countries. These findings strengthen arguments that food has a universal appeal that can be utilised as soft power in diplomacy. Recognition of food's influence on travel decisions also indicates MSME entrepreneurs possess consumer perspectives that can inform their gastrodiploacy strategies. This understanding can form the basis for developing programs focused not only on production but also on experience creation.

3.10 Comparative Analysis: Learning from International Gastrodiploacy Success

Comparative examination of gastrodiploacy initiatives in Thailand, South Korea, and Malaysia reveals instructive patterns relevant to Indonesia's strategic development. Table 3 synthesizes key features, success metrics, and lessons learned from these programs.

Table 3 *Comparative analysis of international gastrodiploacy programs*

Country/Program	Key Features	Success Metrics	Lessons for Indonesia	References
THAILAND "Global Thai" / "Kitchen of the World" (2002-present)	• Government financial incentives for Thai restaurant establishment abroad • Culinary training and certification programs • Quality control and branding standards ("Thai Select" certification) • Integration with tourism promotion campaigns • Public-private partnerships with restaurant owners • Royal endorsement and cultural prestige • Standardized recipes and ingredients supply chain	• Growth from 5,500 (2002) to 15,000+ Thai restaurants globally (2012) • Thai food exports increased 30% (2002-2010) • Enhanced tourism appeal: 40% of tourists cite food as primary attraction • Elevated Thailand's nation brand rankings (soft power index) • Generated \$2.2 billion in export revenue (2019) • Created 145,000+ jobs in restaurant sector	• Systematic government coordination and sustained funding essential • Quality standardization maintains brand integrity globally • Long-term commitment (15+ years) yields cumulative benefits • Integration with tourism multiplies economic impact • Celebrity chef ambassadors accelerate international awareness • Diaspora communities critical for authenticity and distribution	Wilson (2013); Chapple-Sokol (2013); Rockower (2012)
SOUTH KOREA "Korean Cuisine to the World" / "Hansik Globalization" (2009-present)	• \$77 million government investment (2009-2014) • Korean Cultural Centers offering cooking classes globally • Quality certification for Korean restaurants abroad • Integration with K-pop and K-drama cultural exports • Standardized recipes and training materials • Celebrity chef training programs	• Korean restaurants increased from 9,000 (2009) to 30,000+ globally (2019) • Korean food exports doubled 2009-2019 (\$7.6 billion) • Bibimbap and kimchi gained UNESCO recognition • Enhanced "Cool Korea" nation brand • K-food mentioned in 85% of travel blogs about Korea	• Synergy with broader cultural exports (pop culture) amplifies impact exponentially • Government leadership essential but private sector executes • Celebrity chef ambassadors and media exposure accelerate global awareness • Diaspora engagement critical for maintaining authenticity • Health/wellness positioning resonates in Western markets • Social media creates viral cultural moments	Kim & Kim (2021); Suktarachan & Thammachai (2025)

Country/Program	Key Features	Success Metrics	Lessons for Indonesia	References
	• Research on health benefits of Korean cuisine • Social media campaigns (#KoreanFood)	• Generated \$10+ billion in cultural export value		
MALAYSIA	• Certification program for Malaysian restaurants globally • Culinary training with focus on halal standards • Marketing support and promotional materials • Collaboration with tourism authorities • Emphasis on multicultural fusion (Malay-Chinese-Indian) • "Malaysia My Second Home" program integration • Halal certification as competitive advantage • Regional roadshows and chef exchanges	• 3,000+ certified Malaysian restaurants worldwide (2020) • Halal food exports increased 45% (2010-2020) • Positioned Malaysia as global halal food hub • Food tourism growth of 40% (2010-2018) • Recognition in Michelin guides (Penang, Kuala Lumpur) • Generated \$5 billion in halal export revenue (2019)	• Halal certification provides competitive advantage in Muslim-majority markets • Multicultural culinary diversity as strength, not dilution • Certification provides quality assurance for international consumers • Focus on both restaurant proliferation AND product exports • Regional proximity (ASEAN) enables easier market penetration • Food heritage preservation through documentation	Eser & Karaosmanoğlu (2024); Gündüz et al. (2024)

Note: This comparative analysis synthesizes findings from multiple sources to identify transferable best practices for Indonesia's gastrodiploamcy development. Success metrics are cumulative over program duration. All three countries demonstrate that sustained government commitment, quality standardization, and integration with broader cultural diplomacy strategies are essential for gastrodiploamcy success.

Synthesis of Comparative Insights for Indonesia:

These three cases demonstrate that successful gastrodiploamcy requires: (1) Sustained government financial commitment and policy coordination; (2) Quality standardization balanced with cultural authenticity; (3) Integration with broader cultural diplomacy and tourism strategies; (4) Public-private sector collaboration with clear role delineation; (5) Long-term vision with incremental implementation; (6) Leveraging unique competitive advantages (e.g., Indonesia could emphasize halal certification, archipelagic diversity, and fusion traditions).

Indonesia possesses comparable, arguably superior culinary diversity to these nations, yet lacks equivalent systematic coordination. The findings from this study indicate high MSME receptivity and government support willingness, suggesting that primary barriers are organizational and educational rather than cultural or economic. Adapting elements from these international models, particularly Thailand's systematic restaurant expansion, Korea's cultural integration approach, and Malaysia's halal positioning, while respecting Indonesia's unique archipelagic diversity, could catalyse rapid gastrodiploamcy development.

3.11 Implications for Vocational Skill Model Development

3.11.1 Curriculum Design

Based on research findings and international comparative analysis, a comprehensive vocational skill model for gastrodiploamcy should integrate six core modules: 1) Fundamental Modules: Understanding gastronomy and gastrodiploamcy concepts; Soft power theory and cultural diplomacy foundations; Indonesian culinary history and regional diversity; Food's role in international relations and nation branding. 2) Practical Modules: Traditional food branding techniques; Social media strategies for culinary promotion; Attractive packaging development integrating cultural elements; Food photography and visual storytelling. 3) Business Modules: Export regulation navigation and documentation; International food safety standards (HACCP, ISO); Foreign market penetration strategies; Halal certification and its strategic value. 4) Technology Modules: Digital platform utilization for marketing; International e-commerce for culinary products; Virtual food presentation and online cooking demonstrations; Data analytics for market research. 5) Cultural Competency Modules: Cross-cultural

communication in business contexts; Adapting products for international tastes while maintaining authenticity; Understanding target market cultural preferences and dietary restrictions. 6) Network Development Modules: Building relationships with international distributors; Collaboration with Indonesian diaspora communities; Participation strategies for international food exhibitions; Leveraging diplomatic missions and cultural centers..

3.11.2 Pedagogical Approach

Vocational skill models should be supported by broader ecosystem interventions: 1) Partnerships with government institutions for regulatory facilitation and export support. 2) Collaboration with e-commerce platforms for market access and digital infrastructure. 3) Networks with Indonesian diaspora communities abroad for market intelligence and distribution channels. 4) Linkages with national tourism promotion programs to leverage synergies. 5) Financing mechanisms, including microloans, grants, and subsidies for capacity building. 6) Quality certification programs specific to Indonesian gastrodiploacy standards.

3.11.3 Ecosystem Support

Vocational skill models should be supported by: 1) Partnerships with government institutions for regulatory facilitation. 2) Collaboration with e-commerce platforms for market access. 3) Networks with Indonesian diaspora communities abroad. 4) Linkages with national tourism promotion programs.

4. Conclusion

This preliminary study confirms that significant potential exists for gastrodiploacy development among Indonesian MSMEs, though this is constrained by low awareness and limited conceptual understanding. The research addressed three key questions regarding MSME perceptions of gastrodiploacy (RQ1), vocational skill needs (RQ2), and barriers to TVET integration (RQ3). Findings reveal a paradox: MSME entrepreneurs intuitively recognise gastrodiploacy's strategic value (100% see it as important), despite limited formal knowledge (only 31.8% are familiar with the concept). This suggests that effective capacity-building programs could rapidly translate latent understanding into practical capabilities for cultural diploacy and business development. Comparative analysis with Thailand's "Kitchen of the World," South Korea's "Hansik Globalization," and Malaysia's gastrodiploacy initiatives reveals common success factors: sustained government commitment, quality standardization, integration with broader cultural diploacy, public-private collaboration, and long-term vision. Indonesia possesses comparable culinary richness yet lacks equivalent systematic coordination, representing both a challenge and significant opportunity.

4.1 Key Recommendations

Based on research findings, several actionable recommendations emerge: 1) Develop Culturally-Responsive TVET Curricula: Create comprehensive gastrodiploacy vocational training programs integrating theoretical foundations (soft power, cultural diploacy) with practical skills (digital marketing, export navigation, cultural branding). The proposed six-module framework provides a blueprint for implementation. 2) Establish Accessible Information Systems: Address the 63.6% of respondents citing limited market information as a barrier by creating centralized digital platforms providing export regulations, international market data, potential buyer databases, and success case studies. 3) Create Public-Private Partnerships: The 68.2% citing regulatory complexity as primary barrier requires coordinated government-MSME collaboration to streamline export licensing, provide regulatory facilitation, and offer financial support mechanisms (grants, subsidies, microloans) for capacity building. 4) Leverage Digital Platforms: Building on respondents' strong preference for social media promotion, develop national digital gastrodiploacy campaigns, create e-commerce infrastructure for culinary exports, and provide digital marketing training tailored to MSME contexts. 5) Implement Phased National Program: Following international best practices, establish a coordinated national gastrodiploacy program with pilot implementation in high-MSME density regions (e.g., Garut), followed by regional expansion and national scaling over 3-5 years. 6) Integrate with Tourism and Cultural Diploacy: Learn from South Korea's success by coordinating gastrodiploacy with broader cultural exports (e.g., Indonesian arts, music, film) and tourism promotion to create synergistic soft power effects.

4.2 Study Contributions

This study makes three significant contributions. First, it provides empirical evidence of Indonesian MSME entrepreneurs' perceptions and readiness for gastrodiploacy, filling a gap in scholarly literature. Second, it proposes a theoretically grounded, practically oriented vocational skills framework adaptable to TVET contexts. Third, through comparative international analysis, it identifies transferable lessons from successful gastrodiploacy programs relevant to Indonesia's unique context.

4.3 Future Research Directions

These findings provide a foundation for future research: 1) Multi-Regional Studies: Expand geographic scope to capture Indonesia's culinary diversity across the archipelago (Sumatra, Bali, Sulawesi, Papua), validating and extending findings beyond West Java. 2) Longitudinal Assessment: Track MSME development over time after gastrodiplomacy training interventions to assess long-term impact on business performance, international market penetration, and contribution to national soft power. 3) Large-Scale Quantitative Research: Conduct statistically representative surveys ($n > 300$) across multiple provinces to enable generalisation and advanced statistical modelling. 4) Experimental Intervention Studies: Implement randomized controlled trials comparing MSMEs receiving gastrodiplomacy training versus control groups to establish causal relationships. 5) Policy Implementation Research: Document national gastrodiplomacy program implementation, identifying best practices, challenges, and success factors in real-world policy contexts. 6) Comparative International Research: Conduct in-depth comparative studies with other ASEAN nations (Vietnam, Philippines) to identify region-specific patterns and opportunities for regional gastrodiplomacy collaboration.

4.4 Concluding Remarks

Indonesia stands at a pivotal moment in recognizing and leveraging its extraordinary culinary heritage as a strategic soft power asset. This study demonstrates that MSME entrepreneurs—often overlooked in diplomatic and cultural policy—possess both intuitive understanding and strong willingness to participate in gastrodiplomacy. With systematic TVET interventions, government support, and learning from international best practices, Indonesia can transform its culinary diversity from latent potential into active diplomatic and economic power. The universal consensus (100%) among respondents regarding training needs provides a clear mandate for action. As gastrodiplomacy scholar Paul Rockower noted, "the way to win hearts and minds is through the stomach"—Indonesia has the ingredients; it now needs the recipe for coordinated, sustained gastrodiplomacy development.

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Conflict of interest

The authors declare no competing interests exist regarding this manuscript. No financial relationships with organizations could potentially influence the reported research. Authors hold no patents or products related to the subject matter. The research was conducted with complete academic independence, and all funding sources are transparently disclosed. Authors confirm that research objectives, methodology, and findings interpretation were conducted without external commercial influence. All authors have reviewed and approved the final manuscript, taking full responsibility for its content and integrity.

Author Contribution

All authors contributed equally to research conception, design, execution, analysis, and reporting.
Conceptualization: A.M., M.S.B., and A.A. jointly developed research concepts and theoretical frameworks.
Methodology: A.M., S.S., and T.S. designed methodological frameworks and instruments. Data collection: A.M., A.A., and Y.R. coordinated fieldwork and survey administration. **Analysis:** M.S.B., A.M., and A.A. conducted statistical analyses and thematic coding, with all authors participating in interpretation. **Writing:** Initial drafts by A.M. and M.S.B., with substantial contributions from all co-authors. S.S. and T.S. contributed to **gastronomy sections**, while Y.R. provided **vocational education expertise**. Review and approval: All authors provided critical feedback and approved the final manuscript, taking accountability for research integrity.

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