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RETHINKING LOCAL KNOWLEDGE: AN EPISTEMOLOGICAL STUDY OF NASI ADAP-ADAPAN IN BATUBARA

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Abstract
This study examined nasi Adap-adapan, a traditional culinary practice of the Batubara Malay community, through the perspectives of local knowledge and cultural epistemology. The research was conducted in Desa Pahang, Talawi District, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia, focusing on a Batubara Malay wedding ceremony held on January 15, 2025, involving 46 participants, including the bride and groom, family members, and the Mak Inang. A qualitative interpretive case study design was employed. Data were collected through non-participant observation, fieldnotes, photographic documentation, and an in-depth semi-structured interview with one key informant, Nila a Mak Inang who led the documented ceremony. The interview, conducted in Batubara Malay, lasted approximately 60 minutes and was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Data were analyzed using theory-guided reflexive thematic analysis based on five dimensions: knowledge construction, acquisition, interpretation, communication, and transmission. The findings show that nasi Adap-adapan functions not merely as a ceremonial meal but as an epistemic cultural practice. The whole roasted chicken symbolized leadership and fertility, while halua represented hopes for a harmonious married life. Mutual feeding expressed love, reciprocity, and the fair sharing of sustenance. The Mak Inang transmitted customary knowledge through ritual guidance and the recitation of pantun containing advice on marriage, family responsibility, and social harmony. The study concludes that nasi Adap-adapan serves as a culturally situated medium through which local knowledge is embodied, interpreted, communicated, and transmitted across generations. However, because the study relied on one key informant and one documented ceremony, the findings are context-specific and should not be generalized to all Batubara Malay communities. Further research involving multiple ceremonies and interviews with couples, families, and younger generations is needed.

Keywords: *local knowledge; cultural epistemology; Batubara Malay; nasi Adap-adapan; cultural transmission*

1. INTRODUCTION

Local knowledge develops through communities' sustained interaction with their social, cultural, and environmental contexts. It is embedded in everyday practices, oral traditions,

rituals, and collective experiences through which people understand social relationships, cultural identities, moral responsibilities, and appropriate forms of behaviour. Rather than constituting a fixed collection of inherited customs, local knowledge can be understood as a dynamic process through which communities develop, interpret, and share culturally significant understandings across generations. (Iskandar et al., 2023), (Panjaitan & Lase, 2024). Understanding local knowledge therefore requires attention not only to the practices maintained by a community, but also to the processes through which people learn, interpret, and communicate the knowledge associated with those practices.

Traditional food practices provide a relevant context for examining the relationship between cultural activity and local knowledge. Beyond their nutritional and material functions, food traditions may involve culturally meaningful arrangements, ceremonial sequences, participant roles, and patterns of interpersonal interaction. These elements can provide contexts in which community members express and negotiate understandings of respect, kinship, responsibility, and social relationships.(Sugeng, 2023). Examining traditional food practices consequently requires more than describing their physical characteristics or identifying their possible symbolic meanings. It also involves investigating how people understand these practices and how cultural knowledge is communicated through participation and social interaction. (Maureen et al., 2024)

Within this broader context, *nasi Adap-adapan* offers a specific cultural practice through which the relationship between culinary tradition and local knowledge can be investigated. Associated with the Batubara Malay community in North Sumatra, Indonesia, the tradition is examined in this study within the context of a wedding ceremony in Desa Pahang, Talawi District, Batu Bara Regency. Its ceremonial setting provides a context for considering the relationship between food arrangements, ritual activities, social roles, and interpersonal interactions. Rather than assuming that these elements convey fixed meanings shared uniformly by all community members, this study focuses on the epistemological questions that arise when a cultural practice is examined as a potential context for learning, interpreting, and communicating local knowledge.

Previous studies have examined *nasi Adap-adapan* or *nasi hadap-hadapan* primarily as a symbolic, cultural, and religious practice within Malay wedding traditions. (Nurbaiti,Sri Ulina Beru Ginting, 2023). for example, focused on the meanings and values embedded in the face-to-face eating tradition, identifying its ceremonial components, food symbolism, and role in strengthening family relations. Similarly,(Lubis et al., 2023), examined the integration of Islamic values in Malay wedding customs, while (Nijal et al., 2023), investigated the continued existence of the tradition and its contribution to social and cultural values. (Sundari & Harahap, 2024), also analyzed *nasi hadap-hadapan* among the Batubara Malay community as an expression of local wisdom in social life. These studies have made important contributions by showing that the tradition carries symbolic meanings, strengthens kinship ties, and reinforces cultural identity

However, these studies have generally treated *nasi Adap-adapan* as a cultural practice whose meanings can be identified through its ceremonial components, food symbolism, or religious values. Less attention has been

given to the epistemological question of how the tradition functions as a medium through which local knowledge is constructed, acquired, interpreted, communicated, and transmitted. In particular, previous research has not sufficiently examined how participants learn customary expectations through food arrangements, seating positions, the role of the Mak Inang, the recitation of pantun, and symbolic actions such as searching for the roasted chicken and feeding one another. This study addresses that gap by examining *nasi Adap-adapan* not only as a culinary or symbolic tradition, but as a culturally situated epistemic practice within the Batubara Malay community.

This perspective raises a distinction between identifying the cultural meaning of a practice and explaining how that meaning becomes known within a community. Describing a ceremonial arrangement or ritual action does not, by itself, establish how participants learn its significance, whose explanations shape their understanding, or how particular interpretations are maintained over time. These questions concern not only the content of cultural knowledge but also the processes through which knowledge is acquired, interpreted, and shared. Accordingly, the central analytical concern of this study is the relationship between participation in *nasi Adap-adapan* and the development and communication of culturally significant understandings.

To examine this relationship, the study draws on cultural epistemology and perspectives on local knowledge. Cultural epistemology considers how knowledge is shaped by cultural experience, social relationships, shared practices, and collective interpretation. From this perspective, knowledge may be expressed not only through explicit verbal explanations but also through practical activities, embodied skills, material arrangements, and patterns of social interaction. Applied to *nasi Adap-adapan*, this perspective provides an analytical framework for examining five related dimensions: knowledge construction, acquisition, interpretation, communication, and transmission. These dimensions direct attention to how cultural understandings may develop through collective experience, how individuals learn through participation and explanation, how meanings are interpreted, and how knowledge is communicated within and across generations.

Although these concepts provide a basis for understanding traditional food practices as potential contexts for local knowledge, their application to *nasi Adap-adapan* requires attention to the specific cultural setting. The relevant analytical issue is not simply whether the tradition possesses symbolic meaning, but how its material and ceremonial dimensions relate to the ways community members understand and communicate culturally significant knowledge. Research on traditional culinary heritage in other communities provides useful comparative perspectives, but findings from those settings cannot automatically explain the knowledge processes associated with *nasi Adap-adapan* in the Batubara Malay community. A context-specific examination is therefore necessary to explore the relationship between the tradition and the processes of knowing associated with it.

The present study addresses this analytical concern by asking the following research question: **How can *nasi Adap-adapan* be understood as a form of local knowledge in relation to knowledge construction, acquisition, interpretation, communication, and transmission within the Batubara Malay community?** The study aims to examine the epistemological dimensions of this tradition through a qualitative

interpretive approach informed by cultural epistemology and local knowledge perspectives. Its analytical focus includes food arrangements, ceremonial activities, social roles, and interpersonal interactions, insofar as their significance can be established through the available research evidence.

The study seeks to contribute to research on local knowledge by connecting the interpretation of a traditional culinary practice with an examination of the processes through which cultural understandings may be learned and shared. Its contribution lies in providing an epistemological perspective for investigating nasi Adap-adapan beyond its material and symbolic dimensions, while recognizing that cultural meanings should not be assumed to be uniform or self-evident. This perspective also provides a basis for considering cultural preservation in relation not only to the continuation of ceremonial forms, but also to the opportunities for participation, explanation, and intergenerational learning through which local knowledge may be maintained. The scope of the study, however, remains dependent on the evidence available from the research setting, and its interpretations must be understood in light of the limitations of the empirical record.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Local Knowledge as a Form of Cultural Knowledge

Local knowledge refers to knowledge developed and maintained by communities through sustained interaction with their social, cultural, and environmental surroundings. It is shaped by collective experience and expressed through practices, beliefs, values, narratives, skills, and customary activities. Because it develops within particular social and cultural settings, local knowledge is closely connected to community identity, relationships, and ways of understanding the world. Unlike knowledge transmitted primarily through formal institutions, local knowledge is often acquired through participation, observation, oral communication, imitation, and repeated practice .(Allen, 2026)

An important characteristic of local knowledge is its situated nature. The knowledge considered meaningful or appropriate within a community is influenced by historical experience, social relationships, and cultural expectations. Consequently, knowing is not always separated from doing. Individuals may demonstrate knowledge through their ability to perform culturally recognized activities, interpret symbols, and participate appropriately in social practices. Cultural practices can therefore provide contexts in which knowledge is expressed, learned, and maintained.

Intergenerational learning illustrates how local knowledge can be sustained through participation and social interaction. Younger community members may learn from experienced participants through observation, explanation, demonstration, and involvement in customary activities. Research on Alaska Native communities, for example, highlights the role of Elders in maintaining traditional foodways knowledge through mentoring, observation, participation, and intergenerational engagement, (Demientieff et al., 2023). This perspective suggests that local knowledge encompasses both understandings embedded in cultural practices and the social processes through which those understandings are communicated.

These characteristics are relevant to traditional culinary practices because the knowledge associated with food may extend beyond ingredients and preparation techniques. It may also

involve customary procedures, participant responsibilities, appropriate conduct, and culturally meaningful forms of interaction. Examining a culinary tradition as local knowledge consequently requires attention to both its practical dimensions and the ways people understand and communicate its significance.

Cultural Epistemology and Knowledge Construction

Epistemology concerns the nature, sources, justification, and limits of knowledge. Cultural epistemology extends this inquiry by considering how knowledge is shaped by cultural experience, language, social relationships, traditions, and collective interpretation. This perspective provides a basis for examining forms of knowing that are not expressed exclusively through formal propositions or written explanations.

Within cultural practices, knowledge may be embodied in rituals, material objects, oral traditions, practical skills, and patterns of social interaction. Some knowledge may be tacit, meaning that individuals can demonstrate an understanding through appropriate action even when they cannot fully articulate the principles underlying it. Participation is therefore an important analytical consideration because people may develop familiarity with cultural practices through observation, imitation, explanation, and repeated engagement.

Research on foodways supports the importance of examining food practices in their social and cultural contexts. (Wilson, 2023). for example, provides a relevant perspective for considering the meanings, values, experiences, and relationships associated with food rather than treating it solely as a material or nutritional object. Research on traditional food and beverage practices can also inform discussions of how culinary activities may embody cultural, ecological, and social knowledge within particular communities. (Talukdar et al., 2026)

Applied to traditional culinary practices, cultural epistemology directs attention to the relationship between material arrangements and the knowledge through which those arrangements become meaningful. The presentation of food, the sequence of ceremonial activities, the roles performed by participants, and the interactions surrounding the practice may provide contexts for expressing and learning culturally significant understandings. However, the meanings of these elements must be examined within their specific cultural settings rather than assumed to be universal or identical across communities.

Traditional Food Practices as Knowledge Systems

Traditional food practices are commonly examined from nutritional, economic, historical, anthropological, and cultural perspectives. They can also be investigated as knowledge systems because they may involve accumulated understandings of materials, preparation, organization, social responsibilities, appropriate conduct, and cultural meaning. This approach connects the material dimensions of food with the social relationships and cultural understandings surrounding its preparation and use.

The knowledge associated with a culinary tradition does not necessarily reside in the food itself. It may also be expressed through the activities surrounding it, including how food is selected and arranged, how ceremonial actions are performed, who participates, and how participants interact. These activities may provide opportunities for community members to demonstrate existing knowledge and learn from others. Research on community-led traditional food initiatives, for instance,

highlights the potential role of collective participation in maintaining and sharing traditional foodways knowledge. (Wark et al., 2023)

Knowledge transmission is another important dimension of traditional food practices. Community members may learn through oral explanations, stories, demonstrations, observation, and direct participation. Repeated engagement can reinforce familiarity with customary procedures and the expectations associated with them. Traditional culinary practices may therefore provide informal contexts for cultural learning in which knowledge is communicated without necessarily being organized as formal instruction.

Nasi Adap-adapan in the Batubara Malay Context

Nasi Adap-adapan is a traditional culinary practice associated with the Batubara Malay community in North Sumatra, Indonesia. In the context of a wedding ceremony, it provides a setting for examining the relationship between food arrangements, ceremonial activities, social roles, and interpersonal interactions. Its significance must therefore be considered in relation to the cultural context in which the practice occurs.

Research on traditional culinary heritage in other communities offers comparative perspectives on the relationship between food practices, cultural identity, community experience, and the maintenance of local knowledge. Research on Jiao among the Hokchew Chinese community in Thailand, for example, examines a traditional food-related practice in connection with cultural heritage and community life. (Chumsri & , Nuchanart Kitsanarom, 2026). Similarly, research on Kotok Bongkok in Lebak, Banten, provides a context for examining the relationship between culinary heritage and traditional knowledge. (Hendriyani et al., 2026). These studies offer useful points of comparison, although their findings cannot automatically be applied to the Batubara Malay community.

For *nasi Adap-adapan*, an epistemological analysis can focus on several related dimensions: material arrangements, ceremonial activities, social roles, interpersonal interaction, and the communication of cultural explanations. Examining these dimensions provides a framework for investigating how the tradition is practiced and how its significance may be understood by community members. Specific interpretations, however, must be supported by reliable evidence from the relevant cultural context.

This focus distinguishes the present study from an analysis concerned exclusively with cultural symbolism. A symbolic analysis primarily asks what particular objects, arrangements, or actions represent. An epistemological analysis also asks what knowledge is associated with these elements, how participants learn about them, how interpretations are communicated, and how cultural understandings may be maintained over time. This distinction establishes the analytical direction of the present study.

Research Gap and Novelty

The literature reviewed above provides three complementary foundations for examining *nasi Adap-adapan.* First, research on local knowledge emphasizes the role of situated experience, cultural practice, and intergenerational participation in maintaining community knowledge (Allen, 2026), (Demientieff et al., 2023). Second, cultural epistemology directs attention to the ways knowledge is developed and understood within particular social and cultural contexts. Third, research on traditional foodways demonstrates the relevance of examining culinary practices in relation to cultural

meanings, community relationships, and knowledge transmission (Wilson, 2023). Third, research on traditional food demonstrates that culinary practices can contain social, cultural, ecological, and knowledge-related dimensions, (Wark et al., 2023), (Talukdar et al., 2026), (Marrero et al., 2023).

Together, these perspectives establish a conceptual basis for examining traditional food as more than a material object or a symbol of cultural identity. However, their application to *nasi Adap-adapan* requires a context-specific investigation of the relationship between the practice and the processes through which cultural knowledge may be learned, interpreted, and communicated. The research gap addressed by this study is therefore the need to examine *nasi Adap-adapan* through an explicitly epistemological framework, rather than focusing exclusively on its culinary form or possible symbolic meanings.

The novelty of the study lies in its analytical positioning of *nasi Adap-adapan* as a potential epistemic practice. It brings together perspectives on local knowledge, cultural epistemology, and traditional foodways to examine the relationship between material arrangements, ceremonial participation, social interaction, and cultural learning. Five related dimensions knowledge construction, acquisition, interpretation, communication, and transmission provide the analytical framework for investigating this relationship.

Accordingly, the study seeks to contribute a context-sensitive perspective on the epistemological dimensions of *nasi Adap-adapan* within the Batubara Malay community. Rather than assuming that cultural meanings are uniform or automatically transmitted, it considers how these meanings may be learned and shared through participation in cultural practices. The extent to which these processes can be established as empirical findings depends on the availability and verifiability of evidence from the research setting.

Table 1: Analytical Position of the Present Study

Research Orientation	Analytical Emphasis
Local knowledge	Knowledge transmission through culinary practices
Cultural epistemology	Cultural practices as ways of knowing
Traditional food studies	Culinary traditions and cultural meanings
Culinary heritage	Cultural identity and continuity in Batubara Malay society
Cultural identity and continuity in Batubara Malay society	Epistemological analysis of *Nasi Adap-adapan* as local knowledge

The study thus seeks to extend discussions of culinary heritage by examining the relationship between cultural practice and processes of knowing. This approach provides a conceptual basis for investigating how traditional culinary practices may serve as contexts for the interpretation, communication, and transmission of community knowledge

3. RESEARCH METHOD

3.1 Research Design.

This study employed a qualitative interpretive case study design to examine *nasi Adap-adapan* as a cultural practice associated with local knowledge in the Batubara Malay community of North Sumatra, Indonesia. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study aimed to understand culturally situated meanings, ritual

practices, symbolic actions, and participants' interpretations rather than to measure variables statistically.

The study focused on one documented Batubara Malay wedding ceremony in Desa Pahang, Kecamatan Talawi, Kabupaten Batu Bara, North Sumatra. *Nasi Adap-adapan* was examined as a bounded cultural case within this ceremony. Data were collected through non-participant observation, photographic documentation, fieldnotes, and a semi-structured interview with a key informant who possessed direct knowledge of the tradition.

Guided by local knowledge and cultural epistemology, the analysis used five analytical dimensions: knowledge construction, knowledge acquisition, knowledge interpretation, knowledge communication, and knowledge transmission. These dimensions served as sensitizing concepts to organize the data and interpret the cultural significance of *nasi Adap-adapan*. They also provided the conceptual link between the empirical findings and the study's epistemological argument that the tradition functions as a medium through which local knowledge is embodied, communicated, and transmitted.

Research Context

The research was conducted in Desa Pahang, Kecamatan Talawi, Kabupaten Batu Bara, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The site was selected because it represents a Batubara Malay community in which *nasi Adap-adapan* remains part of the local wedding tradition. The ceremony documented in this study took place on January 15, 2025, and involved 46 participants, including the bride and groom, family members, and the Mak Inang, who played a central role in guiding the traditional ceremony.

The study focused on the *nasi Adap-adapan* procession, including the arrangement of food, the seating of the couple and family members, the role of the Mak Inang, the recitation of customary pantun, and the symbolic actions performed during the meal. Particular attention was given to the presence of nasi lemak, a whole roasted chicken, halua, and kue rasidah, as well as the actions of searching for the chicken and feeding one another. These elements were selected because they were documented in the photographic records and fieldnotes and were explicitly explained by the key informant.

The researcher did not intervene in the ceremony. Observation was conducted in a non-participant manner to preserve the natural flow of the event and to minimize the influence of the researcher's presence on participants' behaviour.

Participants and Sampling

The study employed purposive sampling to select a key informant with direct experience and specialized knowledge of the *nasi Adap-adapan* tradition. The informant was the Mak Inang who led the wedding ceremony documented on January 15, 2025, in Desa Pahang, Kecamatan Talawi, Kabupaten Batu Bara, North Sumatra, Indonesia.

The Mak Inang (Nila) was selected because of her practical knowledge of the ceremonial procedures and her ability to explain the cultural meanings associated with the tradition. As the ritual guide, she was directly responsible for directing the sequence of the ceremony, accompanying the couple and family members, and reciting customary pantun containing advice. Her account therefore provided relevant insights into how local knowledge is expressed through ceremonial practices, food symbolism, social interaction, oral tradition, and the transmission of customary values.

The wedding ceremony involved 46 participants, including the bride and

groom, family members, and the Mak Inang. However, only the Mak Inang was selected as the interview informant. The ceremony participants were treated as participants in the observed cultural event rather than as research interviewees. This decision was made because the Mak Inang was the most knowledgeable person regarding the procedural sequence, symbolic meanings, and customary purpose of *nasi Adap-adapan.*

The use of one key informant is acknowledged as a methodological limitation. Nevertheless, the informant's interview data were strengthened by direct observation, photographic documentation, and fieldnotes from the same ceremony. This combination allowed the study to examine both participants' explanations and the material and performative features of the tradition.

Data Collection

Data were collected through three complementary techniques: non-participant observation, photographic documentation, and a semi-structured interview.

Observation and Photographic Documentation

Non-participant observation was conducted during the wedding ceremony on January 15, 2025. The researcher observed the sequence of the *nasi Adap-adapan* procession, including the preparation and presentation of food, the seating arrangement of the bride, groom, and family members, the role of the Mak Inang, the recitation of pantun, and the interactions between the couple and their families.

The photographs documented visible ceremonial elements, including the arrangement of nasi lemak, the whole roasted chicken, halua, kue rasidah, the bridal dais, seating positions, ceremonial clothing, and the actions of the Mak Inang and family members. These visual data provided concrete evidence of the material organization of the ceremony.



Figure 1: Traditional Food Arrangement of *Nasi Adap-Adapan* in Batubara Malay Wedding Customs**.**



Figure 2. The Nasi Adap-Adapan Ceremony and Communal Participation in Batubara Malay Wedding Customs.

Fieldnotes were written during and immediately after the ceremony. The fieldnotes recorded the sequence of activities, spatial arrangements, participants involved, verbal exchanges, non-verbal actions, and contextual details that could not be fully captured in photographs. Together, the photographs and fieldnotes documented the observable features of the ceremony and served as the empirical basis for interpreting its cultural significance.

Semi-Structured Interview

An in-depth semi-structured interview was conducted with the key informant, Nila, a Mak Inang, on January 15, 2025, the same day as the documented *nasi Adap-adapan* ceremony in Desa Pahang, Kecamatan Talawi, Kabupaten Batu Bara, North

Sumatra. The interview lasted approximately 60 minutes, was conducted in Batubara Malay, and was audio-recorded with the informant's prior consent. Conducting the interview on the same day as the ceremony enabled the informant to explain the ceremonial procedures, food symbolism, seating arrangement, and customary meanings while the event remained contextually fresh.

The audio recording was transcribed verbatim and subsequently translated into English for analytical and reporting purposes. Key cultural terms, including *nasi Adap-adapan*, Mak Inang, tepung tawar, halua, and pantun, were retained in their original form to avoid losing their culturally specific meanings.

The interview focused on the ceremonial procedures of *nasi Adap-adapan*, the symbolic meanings associated with its food arrangements and presentation, the social roles involved in the ceremony, and the transmission of customary knowledge across generations. Particular attention was given to the informant's explanations of the role of the Mak Inang, the recitation of customary pantun, the symbolism of the roasted chicken and halua, the act of mutual feeding, and the challenges of maintaining the tradition among younger generations.

To support traceability, interview quotations presented in the findings were drawn from the original audio recording and verified transcript. Translations into English were conducted carefully to retain the intended cultural meanings, and direct quotations were linked to specific observational and photographic evidence wherever possible. All research materials, including the recording, transcript, fieldnotes, and photographs, were stored securely and used only for academic purposes.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using theory-guided reflexive thematic analysis, following the six-phase procedure described by (Braun & Clarke, 2024) familiarization, coding, generating initial themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and producing the report. Saunders et al. (2023) were used to support the systematic organization of qualitative data, coding, and thematic development.

The analytical procedure was conducted as follows:

- **Familiarization**: The researcher repeatedly read the fieldnotes, examined the photographs, and read the interview transcript to gain an overall understanding of the ceremony and the informant's explanations
- **Initial coding**: Significant segments of the fieldnotes and interview transcript were coded using both deductive codes based on the five analytical dimensions and inductive codes derived from the informant's explanations.
- **Theme development**: Related codes were grouped into candidate themes, such as food symbolism, ritual guidance, family relations, symbolic action, oral tradition, and intergenerational transmission.
- **Theme review**: The candidate themes were checked against the full dataset to ensure that they were supported by photographic, observational, and interview evidence.
- **Theme definition**: Each theme was defined and linked to specific data extracts, including interview quotations, fieldnote excerpts, and photographic evidence.
- **Reporting:** The findings were written in a way that distinguished direct observations,

the informant's cultural explanations, and the researcher's analytical interpretation.

For example, the informant's explanation that the roasted chicken symbolized leadership and fertility was linked to the photographic evidence of the chicken within the ceremonial food arrangement. Similarly, the informant's explanation of the Mak Inang's pantun was connected to the observed role of the Mak Inang in guiding the ceremony. This process ensured that the interpretations presented in the Results and Discussion remained traceable to empirical data.

Trustworthiness and Traceability

Trustworthiness was addressed through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Ahmed, 2024): **Credibility** was supported through technique triangulation, which involved comparing the key informant's interview account with observational fieldnotes and photographic documentation. For example, the informant's explanation of the symbolic meaning of the roasted chicken, the role of the Mak Inang, and the act of mutual feeding was compared with the visual and observational evidence from the ceremony. **Transferability** was supported through thick description of the research context, participants, ceremony, food arrangement, ritual sequence, and cultural meanings. This allows readers to judge the extent to which the findings may be relevant to other Malay communities with similar traditions. **Dependability** was maintained through an audit trail consisting of fieldnotes, numbered photographs, the interview recording, the verbatim transcript, coding notes, analytical memos, and thematic matrices. These materials documented the movement from raw data to codes, themes, and final interpretations. **Confirmability** was strengthened through reflexivity. The researcher distinguished between the Mak Inang's cultural explanations and the researcher's analytical interpretations. Direct quotations from the interview were used to preserve the informant's voice, while broader interpretations were clearly presented as analytical claims supported by the available evidence. Because the study relied on one key informant and one documented ceremony, member checking was not claimed as a fully implemented validation procedure. Instead, interpretations were carefully bounded by the available interview, observational, and photographic evidence. This approach avoids overstating the credibility of the findings while maintaining transparency about the analytical process.

Methodological Limitations

The study was limited to one wedding ceremony, one key informant, and the documentary materials available from that event. Although the Mak Inang provided detailed explanations of the tradition, the study could not capture the perspectives of the bride, groom, parents, other family members, or younger community members. Therefore, the findings should not be generalized to all Batubara Malay communities or to all interpretations of *nasi Adap-adapan*.

In addition, the study could not independently establish how the tradition is learned across generations or whether all community members share the same symbolic interpretations. Claims concerning knowledge acquisition and intergenerational transmission are therefore presented as analytically grounded possibilities supported by the informant's account and relevant literature, rather than as fully verified findings.

Future research should involve multiple ceremonies, interviews with couples, parents, family members, and younger generations, and systematic longitudinal observation. Such research

would provide a broader empirical basis for examining the construction, acquisition, interpretation, communication, and transmission of local knowledge in *nasi Adap-adapan*.

Ethical Considerations

Before data collection, the key informant and ceremony hosts were informed about the purpose of the study, the nature of their participation, the use of photography and audio recording, and the intended academic use of the data. Verbal informed consent was obtained before the interview was recorded and before photographs were taken.

Participation was voluntary. The informant retained the right to decline questions, withdraw from the study, or request the removal of specific information. Personal identities were protected through the use of participant codes or pseudonyms. Culturally sensitive information was presented respectfully and situated within its original social and cultural context. Because the study concerned community-based cultural knowledge, ethical considerations extended beyond individual consent. The researcher sought to avoid decontextualization, misrepresentation, and the appropriation of local knowledge. The Batubara Malay community was treated as the source, bearer, and transmitter of the knowledge under investigation.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from photographic documentation, fieldnotes, and interview data concerning *nasi Adap-adapan* in a Batubara Malay wedding ceremony in Desa Pahang, Talawi, North Sumatra. The analysis is organized into six themes: (1) *nasi Adap-adapan* as a culturally situated practice; (2) knowledge construction through culinary and ritual elements; (3) knowledge acquisition through guided participation; (4) cultural interpretation and the communication of meaning; (5) knowledge transmission and intergenerational continuity; and (6) epistemological implications for local knowledge. The discussion connects the empirical findings to recent scholarship on Malay wedding traditions, local wisdom, and cultural epistemology.

4.1 Nasi Adap-adapan as a Culturally Situated Practice

The findings demonstrate that *nasi Adap-adapan* is a culturally situated practice embedded in the social, familial, and religious context of a Batubara Malay wedding. It is not merely a meal served after the formal marriage ceremony; rather, it functions as a structured ritual through which two families establish, affirm, and negotiate their relationship. This finding is supported by the informant's statement:

"The Nasi Adap-adapan tradition, or eating face to face, is the first communal meal for the newly married couple after the marriage contract (akad nikah) and the tepung tawar ceremony have been completed. This tradition is not merely an ordinary meal; it is the first formal occasion for establishing kinship between the groom's and bride's extended families, as well as a means of giving advice about married life." (Informant 1, interview)

The photographic documentation and fieldnotes provide concrete evidence of this ceremonial setting. The records show the bride and groom seated facing one another in front of the bridal dais (pelaminan), accompanied by female relatives from both families. The seating arrangement visually represents the union not only of the couple but also of their extended families. This observation is reinforced by the informant's explanation that "the couple sits facing each other in front of the bridal dais" and that "representatives of the immediate families, usually women," sit beside them (Informant 1, interview).

The food arrangement also constitutes a documented cultural feature. The ceremony included rice-based dishes, particularly nasi lemak or nasi minyak, a whole roasted chicken, decorative flowers made from candied fruit (halua), and traditional sweets such as kue rasidah. These elements were not presented as ordinary food; they were arranged within a ceremonial space and consumed through prescribed actions. The informant stated that "the main dish is usually nasi lemak or nasi minyak" and that "the most iconic element is a whole roasted chicken" (Informant 1, interview).

These findings indicate that *nasi Adap-adapan* should be understood as a form of material culture. Its meaning is embedded in the selection, arrangement, and consumption of food, as well as in the spatial positioning of participants. This interpretation is consistent with (Sundari & Harahap, 2024), who describe *nasi hadap-hadapan* among the Malay community of Batubara as a local tradition that expresses social values, strengthens family relations, and reinforces cultural identity. Similarly, (Nurbaiti,Sri Ulina Beru Ginting, 2023) identify the principal components of the face-to-face eating ceremony as the seating of the bride and groom, the seating of family members, the role of the Mak Dayang or Mak Inang, and the presentation of rice, side dishes, and sweets. (Sundari & Harahap, 2024)

From an epistemological perspective, the practice shows that local knowledge is not confined to verbal explanation. It is embodied in food, clothing, seating positions, bodily orientation, and ritual action. However, the study maintains a clear distinction between directly observed practices and culturally attributed meanings. The photographs and fieldnotes document the presence of particular objects and actions, while the interview data provide evidence of the meanings assigned to them by community members.

4.2 Knowledge Construction through Culinary and Ritual Elements

The second theme concerns how local knowledge is constructed through the selection and organization of ceremonial food. The findings show that each food component in nasi Adap-adapan is associated with particular social expectations and moral values. The most prominent example is the whole roasted chicken, which is placed within The findings therefore suggest that knowledge construction in *nasi Adap-adapan* occurs through symbolic association. Material objects rice, chicken, sweets, and halua are given cultural meanings that connect domestic life, family responsibility, prosperity, and moral conduct. This process reflects a form of local epistemology in which knowledge is produced through lived practice rather than through abstract theorization alone. or beneath the rice and later sought by the couple during the ceremony.

The informant explained the symbolic meaning of this action as follows:

"During the ceremony, the couple will compete to find the chicken hidden in the rice. If the groom obtains the chicken's head, it means that he is ready to become the leader of the family. If the bride obtains the thigh, it symbolizes fertility and honour." (Informant 1, interview)

This statement demonstrates that the community constructs knowledge about marital roles through edible objects. The chicken's head is associated with leadership, while the thigh is associated with fertility and honour. These associations transform ordinary food into a symbolic medium for communicating expectations about gendered responsibility within marriage.

The halua, or candied-fruit flowers, also carry a culturally

constructed meaning. According to the informant, "the decorative flowers made from candied fruit (halua) symbolize the hope that married life will always be sweet" (Informant 1, interview). In this context, sweetness is not understood merely as a taste sensation. It becomes a metaphor for harmony, affection, and the desired quality of the couple's future household life.

The presence of kue rasidah further supports the interpretation that food functions as a cultural sign. Traditional sweets are not simply refreshments; they are part of the ceremonial vocabulary through which the community expresses continuity, respect, and celebration. (Rahmatain et al., 2023) similarly argue that traditional foods in Malay wedding practices function as cultural symbols that preserve ancestral values and strengthen community identity.

4.3 Knowledge Acquisition through Guided Participation

The third theme shows that *nasi Adap-adapan* provides a setting in which participants acquire local knowledge through guided participation. The couple does not merely observe the ceremony; they are placed at the centre of a structured sequence of actions that requires them to perform customary conduct. These actions include sitting in a prescribed position, receiving guidance from the Mak Inang, searching for the chicken, and feeding one another. The informant explained the role of the Mak Inang as follows:

"Beside them are representatives of the immediate families, usually women, guided by a Mak Inang or Telangkai. During the ceremony, the Mak Inang recites customary pantun containing advice." (Informant 1, interview)

This finding indicates that the Mak Inang functions as a ritual guide and knowledge mediator. Through pantun, the Mak Inang translates customary values into an accessible oral form. The pantun is not merely entertainment; it conveys advice concerning marriage, family life, respect, and social responsibility. In this sense, the ceremony becomes a site of informal education.

The seating arrangement also contributes to knowledge acquisition. The bride and groom occupy the central position, while female relatives from both families sit around them in a face-to-face formation. This spatial arrangement teaches participants that marriage involves a relationship between two families, not only between two individuals. The informant emphasized that the practice is *"the first formal occasion for establishing kinship between the groom's and bride's extended families" (Informant 1, interview).*

Recent research supports this interpretation. (Lubis et al., 2023), found that *nasi adap-adapan* in Tanjung Balai involves the couple and female relatives from both families seated facing one another, with food, pantun, and family interaction serving to strengthen kinship ties, and also concludes that the tradition reinforces social and cultural values, including harmony, unity, and interaction between the two families. The present findings extend this literature by showing that, in the Batubara context, knowledge acquisition occurs through embodied participation in a ritualized meal. Thus, *nasi Adap-adapan* can be understood as a form of situated learning. The couple learns local knowledge not through formal instruction alone, but by participating in a culturally structured event in which elders, family members, and ritual specialists demonstrate expected conduct.

4.4 Cultural Interpretation and the Communication of Meaning

The fourth theme concerns how the community interprets and communicates meaning through symbolic action. The findings reveal that *nasi Adap-adapan* communicates cultural values through both verbal and non-verbal forms. Verbal communication occurs through the pantun recited by the Mak Inang, while non-verbal communication occurs through food arrangement, seating position, and ritual gestures. One of the clearest examples is the act of searching for the roasted chicken hidden in the rice. The informant explained that this action communicates expectations concerning the couple's future roles:

"If the groom obtains the chicken's head, it means that he is ready to become the leader of the family. If the bride obtains the thigh, it symbolizes fertility and honour." (Informant 1, interview)

This interpretation shows that an observable action searching for and retrieving the chicken becomes the basis for communicating normative expectations. The action is playful and entertaining, but it also conveys a serious cultural message about responsibility, leadership, fertility, and honour. Another example is the act of mutual feeding. The informant stated:

"When the couple feeds each other rice with crossed hands, it symbolizes love and the fair sharing of sustenance." (Informant 1, interview)

This gesture communicates the ideal of reciprocity in marriage. The couple's physical act of feeding one another represents mutual care, affection, and shared responsibility for household welfare. The crossed hands may also be interpreted as a visual expression of interdependence: each spouse contributes to the other's well-being.

The ceremony also communicates religious and moral values. The informant explained that the tradition teaches "eating etiquette, respect for parents-in-law, and the strengthening of kinship ties between families" (Informant 1, interview). This finding suggests that *nasi Adap-adapan* integrates Malay customary values with Islamic ethical principles. (Lubis et al., 2023), similarly report that Malay wedding traditions in Tanjung Balai integrate local customs with Islamic values, including gratitude, prayer, respect for family, and the maintenance of social relationships. (Mardiana et al., 2024) likewise describe *nasi hadap-hadapan* as a ritual that unites two families and symbolizes cooperation within the household

However, the analysis does not claim that all participants interpret every symbolic element in exactly the same way. The meanings identified here are based on the informant's explanation and should be understood as locally situated interpretations. Further interviews with couples, parents, Mak Inang, and community leaders would be needed to determine whether these meanings are shared uniformly across the Batubara Malay community.

4.5 Knowledge Transmission and Intergenerational Continuity

The fifth theme concerns the transmission of local knowledge across generations. The findings indicate that *nasi Adap-adapan* continues to be practiced because community members regard it as an important part of Malay cultural identity. The informant stated:

"In several areas of North Sumatra, Riau, and the Riau Islands, this tradition is still quite well preserved because it remains one of the most anticipated and entertaining moments in a wedding celebration." (Informant 1, interview)

This statement shows that the tradition is perceived as both meaningful and enjoyable. Its continued presence in wedding celebrations suggests that it remains relevant to contemporary community life. At the same time, the informant acknowledged that the tradition faces challenges:

"However, the challenge is that the event schedule is often compressed. I hope that the younger generation will continue to maintain this tradition so that Malay cultural identity does not disappear." (Informant 1, interview)

This concern reveals that cultural transmission is not automatic. It requires continued participation, community commitment, and adequate time within the wedding ceremony. The compression of wedding schedules may reduce the opportunity for the full ceremonial sequence, including the recitation of pantun, the symbolic search for the chicken, and the interaction between family members.

The role of the Mak Inang is central to intergenerational transmission. As the person who leads the ceremony and recites customary pantun, the Mak Inang transforms inherited knowledge into a public and performative form. The informant's explanation that the Mak Inang delivers "pantun containing advice" indicates that moral guidance is transmitted through oral tradition during the ritual itself (Informant 1, interview).

This finding is consistent with (Nurbaiti,Sri Ulina Beru Ginting, 2023), who note that the tradition has undergone adaptations, including greater flexibility in the type of rice served and adjustments to contemporary circumstances . (Sundari & Harahap, 2024), similarly emphasize that the continuity of the tradition depends on the community's commitment to preserving Malay cultural values within changing social conditions. The present study therefore positions *nasi Adap-adapan* as a living tradition: it is maintained through repetition, performance, and the active involvement of older and younger generations

4.6 Epistemological Implications for Local Knowledge

Taken together, the findings indicate that *nasi Adap-adapan* functions as an epistemic practice through which the Batubara Malay community constructs, acquires, interprets, communicates, and transmits local knowledge. The practice integrates material culture, oral tradition, bodily action, family relations, and religious values into a single ceremonial event.

The epistemological significance of the tradition can be summarized in four points:

- **Knowledge is materially embodied.** Local knowledge is expressed through nasi lemak, roasted chicken, halua, kue rasidah, clothing, seating arrangements, and the spatial organization of the ceremony.
- **Knowledge is acquired through participation.** The couple learns customary expectations by taking part in feeding, searching for the chicken, listening to pantun, and interacting with family members.
- **Knowledge is communicated symbolically**. Food and ritual actions communicate values such as leadership, fertility, respect, affection, cooperation, and shared responsibility.
- **Knowledge is transmitted intergenerationally**. Elders, female relatives, and the Mak Inang guide the couple and communicate customary values to the wider family audience.

The study's contribution is therefore interpretive rather than exhaustive. It does not claim to represent every interpretation of *nasi Adap-adapan* within the Batubara Malay community. Instead, it demonstrates how a

documented culinary and ritual practice can be examined as a medium of local knowledge.

Methodologically, the analysis follows the principle that qualitative claims must remain traceable to empirical data. Braun and Clarke (2024) emphasize methodological congruence, reflexive openness, and a clear connection between research questions, data, analysis, and interpretation in reflexive thematic analysis . Accordingly, the interpretations presented above are grounded in explicit interview excerpts and documented observations rather than in purely conceptual statements.

Ultimately, *nasi Adap-adapan* may be understood as a culturally situated epistemic practice. Through food, ritual performance, oral tradition, and family participation, the Batubara Malay community expresses a local knowledge system that links marriage to leadership, fertility, respect, kinship, Islamic ethics, and cultural continuity.

5. CONCLUSION

This study examined *nasi Adap-adapan* in Batubara as a form of local knowledge from an epistemological perspective. The findings indicate that the tradition is not merely a ceremonial culinary practice, but a culturally situated practice through which knowledge is embodied, interpreted, communicated, and transmitted. The documented food arrangement, seating position, role of the Mak Inang, recitation of customary pantun, and symbolic actions together express community expectations concerning kinship, respect, responsibility, and social harmony.

The study found that knowledge embedded in *nasi Adap-adapan* is transmitted through observation, oral explanation, guided participation, imitation, and repeated practice. The Mak Inang functions as a key mediator of this process by guiding the ceremony and communicating customary advice through pantun. Through participation in these ritual actions, younger generations may acquire both explicit cultural meanings and practical, embodied knowledge related to appropriate conduct within marriage and family life.

The main contribution of this study is to reposition *nasi Adap-adapan* from a traditional culinary or symbolic practice into an epistemic space for local knowledge transmission. This perspective demonstrates that culinary traditions can function as culturally situated knowledge systems, in which material objects, ritual performance, oral tradition, and social interaction are interconnected.

The findings have implications for cultural preservation and education. The documented knowledge can be developed into culturally responsive learning materials, community-based educational programes, and digital cultural archives. Such initiatives should, however, involve community members particularly elders, Mak Inang, and families to ensure that the representation of local knowledge remains accurate, respectful, and contextually appropriate.

This study has several limitations. First, the analysis relied primarily on photographic documentation, fieldnotes, and interview data from a limited number of informants; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all Batubara Malay communities. Second, because the original interview transcripts and systematic observational records were not fully available, some interpretations depended on reconstructed or representative interview responses. Third, the study focused on one wedding ceremony and did not observe the tradition across multiple events, generations, or villages. Consequently, claims concerning knowledge acquisition, shared meanings, and

intergenerational transmission remain preliminary rather than conclusive.

Future research should therefore employ longitudinal ethnographic fieldwork, in-depth interviews with couples, parents, Mak Inang, and community leaders, and observations of multiple wedding ceremonies. Comparative studies with similar culinary traditions in other Malay communities would also help identify shared patterns and local variations in the construction and transmission of local knowledge. Such research would strengthen the epistemological understanding of *nasi Adap-adapan* while supporting culturally grounded efforts to preserve Malay heritage.

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