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Product and Packaging Innovation Strategies for Enhancing MSME Competitiveness: A Case Study of Bale Seafood from an Educational Management Perspective

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to examine the influence of creativity and product innovation on business development and competitiveness in Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), using Bale Seafood as a case study. A qualitative descriptive approach was employed, with data collected through in-depth interviews with the business owner and direct field observations. The findings reveal that the owner's creativity in developing diversified processed seafood products, combined with continuous packaging innovation, significantly contributes to business growth, market expansion, and long-term sustainability. Innovation practices at Bale Seafood extend beyond product improvement to include adaptive learning processes, customer engagement, and community-based knowledge exchange. From an educational management perspective, these practices reflect informal learning, experiential knowledge development, and capacity building within the enterprise. The study implies that strengthening learning-based management, entrepreneurial education, and skill development is essential for enhancing MSME innovation capacity. Support from stakeholders, such as training programs and mentoring, can further facilitate the transfer of knowledge and the adoption of appropriate technology. Overall, integrating educational management principles into innovation strategies can serve as an effective approach to improving MSME competitiveness in dynamic market environments.

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INTRODUCTION

The Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector plays a strategic role in supporting inclusive economic growth and social welfare in developing countries, including Indonesia (Aprilia et al., 2025; Sinha et al., 2024). MSMEs are not only a source of employment but also serve as a buffer during

economic shocks, contributing significantly to poverty reduction and regional economic resilience. According to the Ministry of Cooperatives and MSMEs, the MSME sector contributed approximately 61.2% to Indonesia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2024 and absorbed more than 97% of the national workforce. Despite this contribution, MSMEs continue to face structural limitations that hinder productivity growth and competitiveness, particularly in resource-based sectors such as fisheries. These limitations underscore the importance of innovation as a mechanism for value creation and sustainability. From a broader societal perspective, strengthening MSME innovation capacity is crucial not only for economic efficiency but also for empowering local communities through learning, skill development, and adaptive management. Therefore, research on innovation strategies in MSMEs is essential to inform policies and educational interventions that support sustainable economic development.

Although MSMEs dominate Indonesia's economic structure, a persistent productivity gap between MSMEs and large enterprises remains a critical challenge. This gap is particularly evident in fisheries-based MSMEs, which largely depend on primary production and low value-added activities. Many fishery MSMEs still sell raw or minimally processed products, resulting in limited profit margins and vulnerability to price fluctuations (Riana et al., 2020). Furthermore, globalization and changes in consumer preferences toward hygienic, branded, and conveniently packaged products have increased competitive pressure on traditional MSMEs. Limited access to capital, inadequate processing technology, and weak managerial competencies further exacerbate these challenges. From an educational management perspective, these problems are closely linked to insufficient entrepreneurial learning, limited exposure to innovation-oriented training, and weak capacity-building mechanisms. As a result, many MSME actors struggle to transform knowledge into practical innovation. Addressing these structural problems requires not only technological solutions but also learning-based management approaches that emphasize continuous education, experiential learning, and knowledge transfer within MSMEs.

Sumbawa Regency represents a region with abundant marine resources and strong potential for fishery-based economic development. Data from the Marine and Fisheries Office of West Nusa Tenggara Province indicate that fish production in Sumbawa exceeded 45,000 tons in 2023, dominated by tuna, skipjack, and other pelagic species (Amrullah et al., 2023). However, this potential has not been optimally utilized, as most fish catches are sold fresh without further processing. In several coastal villages, small-scale processing activities exist, such as the production of shredded fish and crackers, yet these products are commonly marketed using simple plastic packaging without

labeling, branding, or quality certification. This condition limits product appeal and restricts market access beyond local areas. Field observations also reveal that innovation practices are largely informal and based on trial and error rather than systematic learning. This phenomenon highlights the absence of structured educational management within MSMEs, where innovation should ideally emerge from organized learning processes, mentoring, and reflective business practices.

Previous studies emphasize that product innovation is a key determinant of MSME competitiveness and sustainability. Research by Parawansyah et al. (2024) shows that fishery MSMEs in Eastern Indonesia tend to rely on traditional recipes and conventional packaging, which reduces their competitiveness against modern industrial products. Similarly, Setiyorini (2018) found that MSMEs adopting diversified products and improved packaging experienced significant sales growth within a short period. Other studies highlight the importance of innovation in packaging design, labeling, and branding to enhance perceived product value (Asfar et al., 2025). From an educational perspective, several scholars argue that innovation capacity is closely related to entrepreneurial learning, informal education, and knowledge-sharing practices within MSMEs. However, much of the existing literature focuses on outcomes rather than the learning processes that underpin innovation. Consequently, the role of educational management in shaping innovation behavior among MSME actors remains underexplored.

Despite the growing body of research on MSME innovation, several gaps remain. First, most studies adopt a quantitative approach and emphasize financial performance, while qualitative insights into innovation dynamics at the enterprise level are limited. Second, prior research rarely integrates educational management perspectives, such as learning-based management, capacity building, and experiential learning, into the analysis of MSME innovation. Third, case studies focusing on fishery-based MSMEs in peripheral regions like Sumbawa are still scarce. Existing studies often overlook how local knowledge, social learning, and adaptive strategies influence innovation under resource constraints (Bina Bahari, 2024). As a result, there is limited understanding of how MSME actors internalize learning experiences and translate them into practical innovation. Addressing these gaps is important to develop a more holistic framework that links innovation, education, and sustainability in MSME development.

This study offers novelty by integrating product and packaging innovation analysis with an educational management perspective in the context of fishery-based MSMEs. Unlike previous research that treats innovation as a purely technical or economic process, this study conceptualizes innovation as a

learning-driven activity shaped by experiential knowledge, social interaction, and adaptive management. By examining Bale Seafood MSME as a case study, this research highlights how informal learning, owner creativity, and community-based knowledge exchange contribute to innovation capacity. The study also emphasizes the role of learning-based management in enabling MSMEs to overcome resource limitations and sustain competitiveness. This approach represents a state-of-the-art contribution by bridging entrepreneurship studies, MSME innovation research, and educational management theory. Such integration is crucial for designing more effective capacity-building programs and innovation policies tailored to local contexts.

Based on the above discussion, this study addresses several research questions: (1) what forms of product and packaging innovation are implemented by Bale Seafood MSME; (2) what internal and external factors drive innovation; (3) how innovation influences business sustainability; and (4) what obstacles and adaptive strategies emerge in the innovation process. This research argues that creativity and innovation grounded in learning-based management significantly strengthen MSME competitiveness. By systematically documenting the innovation practices of Bale Seafood, this study contributes both theoretically and practically to MSME and entrepreneurship literature. Academically, it enriches discussions on innovation by incorporating educational management dimensions, while practically, it provides insights for MSME actors and policymakers in designing sustainable innovation strategies rooted in local resources (Porter, 1980; Riana et al., 2020; Bina Bahari, 2024).

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Approach

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach, with the objective of thoroughly understanding the forms of product innovation undertaken by Bale Seafood MSME, and how this innovation serves as a strategy to enhance business competitiveness. This approach was chosen for its capability to describe phenomena in a contextual and natural manner, aligning with real-world situations. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the descriptive qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the experiences, ideas, and strategies applied by business actors through an in-depth interpretation process of the data. In the context of this research, the researcher acts as the main instrument, directly involved in the data collection process to obtain a holistic understanding of the innovation dynamics at Bale Seafood.

Location and Research Subjects

The research was conducted at Bale Seafood MSME, located in Uma Sima, Sumbawa District, Sumbawa Regency. The location was selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that Bale Seafood is an actively innovating marine product processing business, particularly in the products of shredded fish (abon ikan), ikan bage, and fish skin crackers. The research subjects include the two business owners (Ibu Fitriani and Mr. Khariyanul), several employees from the production and marketing departments, and two loyal customers, all of whom are directly involved in or provide feedback on the product innovation process and marketing strategies. The initial interview (observation) with the business owner was conducted on Thursday, October 23, 2025, as part of the field data collection.

Data Sources

The data sources in this research consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews and direct observation at the business location. Secondary data were obtained from supporting documents such as business profiles, production activity photos, sales records, and documents related to training or government assistance. According to Sugiyono (2019) , combining primary and secondary data is essential to produce a comprehensive and valid understanding of the phenomenon under study.

Data Collection Techniques

The data collection process was carried out using three main techniques: Semi-Structured Interview; Conducted with the owner and several employees to gather information related to the business history, forms of product innovation, production process, marketing strategy, as well as challenges and opportunities in maintaining competitiveness. This technique allows flexibility in exploring information according to the interview context while remaining focused on the research objectives (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Participant Observation; Conducted directly on production activities, interaction among employees, and the product packaging process to understand the practical implementation of innovation in the field. Documentation; Involves collecting visual evidence such as product photos, production tools, packaging labels, and administrative documents relevant to Bale Seafood's business activities.

Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using the interactive model, which consists of three main stages: Data Reduction: The process of selection, simplification, and organization of data from interviews and observations to align with the research focus. Conclusion Drawing and Verification: Conducted iteratively by seeking

patterns and themes that represent the relationship between product innovation and the competitiveness of Bale Seafood MSME. The analysis process was carried out from the beginning of data collection until the final writing stage to maintain consistency of meaning and interpretation (Creswell, 2016).

Validasi Data

To ensure the validity and trustworthiness of the research findings, the techniques of source triangulation and time triangulation were employed. *Source Triangulation:* Achieved by comparing the information obtained from the owner, employees, and supporting documents. Time Triangulation: Conducted by performing interviews and observations at different times to minimize bias and enhance the reliability of the research results (Patton, 2015).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Based on the results of interviews and field observations, it was found that Bale Seafood has implemented various innovations encompassing product, packaging, and production process aspects. These innovations have positively impacted sales increases, market expansion, and internal operational efficiency. Data indicates that following the implementation of packaging innovation and the development of flavor variants in mid-2024, the average monthly sales increased from 70-80 packs to approximately 120-150 packs per month. Furthermore, government support, provided in the form of production equipment assistance and training, has helped accelerate the business modernization process. Nevertheless, Bale Seafood still faces several constraints, such as raw material limitations due to weather factors, a lack of human resources in digital marketing, and limited capital for business expansion.

Forms of Innovation

Product Innovation

Initially, Bale Seafood only produced ikan bage (small dried fish) with a single flavor variant and simple packaging. Following increased market demand and the emergence of new competitors, the business owner began innovating through the development of flavor variants and new product types, such as tuna shredded fish (abon ikan tuna), ikan kepilak, split dried fish (ikan asin belah), anchovies (ikan teri), and processed seasoned milkfish (ikan bandeng bumbu olahan). According to Fitriani, the owner of Bale Seafood, product innovation is carried out to maintain customer interest: "We developed squid chili sauce (sambal cumi), dendeng seasoning, and sweet and sour flavors so that customers do not get bored with the same taste," (Fitriani, Personal Interview, December 10,

2025). Furthermore, an interview with a regular customer, Mr. Rijal, revealed: "I have long bought abon here, but now I prefer to buy the squid chili and dendeng. There is variation, so it is not boring. Children also prefer the sweet and spicy seasoned ones," (Consumer Interview, December 10, 2025).

In addition to flavor variants, innovation was also applied to packaging. Products that were initially packaged in simple mica containers now utilize vacuum ziplock and resealable pouch packaging, which enhances shelf life and reinforces the professional image of the product. This packaging change increases customer trust and expands the potential for distribution to external regions. This finding aligns with the research results of Aland Christian et al. (2025) which indicate that product innovation in food SMEs improves business performance, as well as Pranowo et al.'s (2024) study which proves that packaging innovation combined with digital marketing training positively impacts sales.

Packaging and Production Process Innovation

Bale Seafood currently utilizes a vacuum machine and sterilization equipment, provided through assistance from the Fisheries Office, to maintain product quality and hygiene. This process is also supported by the implementation of production hygiene standards adapted from BPOM (National Agency of Drug and Food Control) guidelines, including zoning the production area and adopting a more hygienic drying system. This change in packaging supports efforts to improve product quality and shelf life. "If we use mica, the product cannot last long. But with vacuum packaging, it can last a week in the refrigerator and even longer in the freezer," explained Fitriani & Khariyanul (Interview, December 10, 2025).

This innovation aligns with the view of Tidd and Bessant (2018) that MSME product innovation does not solely depend on formal R&D but can emerge from social learning and simple technology adaptation based on customer experience. This is further reinforced by the research of Rachmawati and Nurhadi (2023), which demonstrated that the adoption of simple technology, such as vacuum and sterilization machines, positively affects production efficiency and consumer trust in Indonesian food MSMEs. The modern vacuum

packaging innovation implemented received positive responses from customers, as noted by Mrs. Ningsih, a frequent traveler: "The most noticeable difference is the vacuum packaging. The product is cleaner and can last much longer when traveling outside the city. The old packaging tore easily and spoiled quickly, so this really helps," (Consumer Interview, December 10, 2025).

Table 1. List of Bale Seafood Products and Innovations

Product	Type of Innovation	New Packaging	Selling Price	Value Increase
Ikan Bage (best seller)	variants such as Bumbu Bali, Asam Pedas (Sweet and Sour), and Dendeng	Vacuum 200gr	Rp 20.000	+30%
Ikan Bandeng Bumbu	Bumbu Sira Padang, Terasi (Shrimp Paste), and Dendeng.	Vacuum 1 kg	Rp 35.000	+40%
Ikan Kepilak	addition of local spice blends	Vacuum 100gr	Rp 10.000	+25%
Ikan Teri Asin	improving salt content and hygiene standards	Ziplock 100gr	Rp 15.000	+20%
Abon Ikan Tuna	spicy and savory variants.	Ziplock 100gr	Rp 35.000	+35%
Ikan Asin Belah	modification of size and hygiene standards.	Ziplock 100gr	Rp 10.000	+15%
Sambal Ikan Asin	special homemade seasonings (salty-sweet-spicy)	Glass Bottle 100gr	Rp 25.000	+25%

Prior to the innovation (in 2023), Bale Seafood's average sales reached approximately 70-80 packs per month. In contrast, following the implementation of flavor and packaging innovation in mid-2024, sales increased to 120-150 packs per month, representing a rise of about 65% within a single year.

Figure 2. Bale Seafood Tuna Shredded Fish Product Label (Researcher Documentation, 2025)

Figure 3. Bale Seafood Production Vacuum Machine (Researcher Documentation, 2025)

Factors Driving Innovation

The innovation at Bale Seafood did not emerge coincidentally but through an interaction between internal factors (creativity and entrepreneurial orientation) and external factors (institutional support and customers). The main internal factor is the creativity of the business owner, who continuously seeks ways to improve products and processes. Fitriani acknowledges that innovative ideas arise from training results and discussions with customers. "In the training, I was taught to set a five-year target. From that point, I realized I needed my own production facility and team," (Fitriani & Khariyanul, Interview, December 10, 2025).

Meanwhile, external factors stem from government support through assistance with vacuum machines, management training, and BPOM certification. This support encourages the enhancement of production standards and provides motivation to continue innovating. This finding reinforces Tambunan's theory (2019) that institutional support is a primary driver in shaping the entrepreneurial orientation and self-reliance of MSMEs. Furthermore, customer feedback serves as a crucial trigger for flavor innovation. For example, when customers complained that the product tasted bland due to a change in the marinating technique, Fitriani immediately reverted to the old method. "We once tried a new way to be faster, but customers said the taste was bland. So, I ultimately returned to the old marinating technique because the flavor is better absorbed," (Fitriani & Khariyanul, Interview, December 10, 2025).

This finding broadens the view of Tidd & Bessant (2018) that product innovation in MSMEs often arises from social learning and a trial-and-error process with customers, rather than from formal research laboratories. This is also consistent with the research by Fauzan & Thamrin (2021) which affirms that the combination of institutional support and market feedback plays a significant role in fostering sustained innovation among MSMEs in the Indonesian food sector.

Impact of Innovation on Competitiveness

The impact of Bale Seafood's innovation is observed across three main dimensions: market performance, product perception, and organizational efficiency.

Market Performance

The sales increase of approximately ±65% within one year proves that product and packaging innovation positively influences market demand. The utilization of social media platforms, such as Facebook Marketplace, WhatsApp, and TikTok, also expanded the consumer reach beyond the region, even accessing migrant workers (TKI) in Hong Kong and Malaysia.

Product Perception

The use of vacuum packaging significantly enhances the perception of product hygiene and aesthetic value, which reinforces customer trust and loyalty. This is consistent with the research by Jocelyn and Christiarini (2023) which found that packaging innovation influences purchase intention and brand trust in processed fish MSMEs in Lombok. Furthermore, the study by Sari and Pratama et al. (2024) also indicated that a combination of consistent product and packaging innovation is capable of improving MSME competitiveness through strengthening brand image and customer loyalty.

Organizational Efficiency and Work Culture

Innovation also has an impact on the internal work system. Work division is now more structured, with the implementation of on-the-job training for employees and interns. Fitriani affirmed, "If an intern says they have an allergy, I immediately send them home. I'm afraid it might compromise the product's hygiene," (Fitriani & Khariyanul, Interview, December 10, 2025). This demonstrates that innovation is not limited to the product but also extends to the mindset and work culture, aligning with the concept of organizational learning (Tidd & Bessant, 2018). In the context of competitiveness, this finding reinforces Porter's theory (1980) that Bale Seafood successfully built a competitive advantage through a strategy of flavor and packaging differentiation, which creates a perception of added value in the eyes of the consumer.

Obstacles and Adaptive Strategies

Despite having implemented innovations, Bale Seafood still faces several challenges, including:

1. Limited production capacity due to reliance on seasonal fish catches and weather conditions.
2. Limited human resources in the field of digital marketing.
3. Limited capital to purchase additional production equipment and expand marketing.

The limited production capacity of Bale Seafood Sumbawa is highly dependent on weather factors and fishing seasons. This often affects service delivery time to consumers, as the business owner admitted: "If it is the rainy season, the drying results are not optimal, so customers sometimes have to wait longer," explained Fitriani & Khariyanul (Interview, December 10, 2025).

To overcome these issues, Bale Seafood implements several strategies:

1. Utilizing a drying machine to maintain production continuity during the rainy season.
2. Collaborating with relevant government agencies to gain access to advanced training and product exhibition opportunitie.
3. Planning the formation of a specialized digital marketing team to expand the online market.

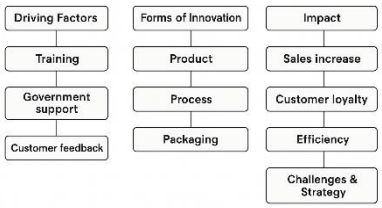

Figure 4. Relationship Among Innovation Driving Factors
Source: Processed Primary Data

The figure above illustrates the relationship between driving factors (owner's creativity, government support, and market needs), forms of innovation (product and process), impact (increased competitiveness and market expansion), and obstacles (production capacity and digital promotion). The relationships among these elements indicate that Bale Seafood's innovation is adaptive and based on social learning, rather than high technology.

Conceptually, this finding enriches the dynamic capability theory (Teece, 2007), which emphasizes the importance of an organization's ability to adapt to change. In MSMEs like Bale Seafood, this dynamic capability is not realized through formal systems but through social flexibility and a network of trust with customers and the local community.

Table 2. Summary of Interview Findings

Theme	Respondent Statement (Ibu Fitriani)
Flavor Innovation	*"We developed variations of squid chili sauce and shredded fish (abon ikan)."*
Packaging Innovation	*"If we use mica, it cannot last long; with vacuum packaging, it can last a week in the refrigerator."*
Government Support	*"Our production house was assisted by the Fisheries Office, compliant with BPOM standards."*
Customer Response	*"There was a complaint about bland taste, so we eventually reverted to the old marinating method."*
Production Obstacle	*"During the rainy season, drying results are not optimal, and customers have to wait longer."*
Future Aspirations	*"We want to have our own production and marketing team."*

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that product and packaging innovation plays a pivotal role in enhancing the competitiveness of Bale Seafood MSME in Sumbawa Regency. Innovations in flavor diversification, the adoption of modern vacuum packaging, and improvements in production hygiene standards have contributed significantly to increased sales performance and the expansion of market reach beyond the local region. These innovations not only elevated product quality but also encouraged the development of a more professional, adaptive, and market-oriented work culture capable of responding to evolving consumer preferences.

The findings further reveal that the innovation process at Bale Seafood is shaped by the interaction between internal and external factors. Internally, the owner's creativity, entrepreneurial commitment, and willingness to learn function as key drivers of innovation. Externally, government assistance, customer feedback, and local collaboration provide essential support that reinforces continuous improvement. This indicates that MSME innovation does not rely solely on advanced technology but can emerge from social learning processes, experiential knowledge, and the effective utilization of local resources.

Overall, this research underscores the importance of strengthening innovation capacity grounded in local wisdom and learning-based management as a sustainable strategy for improving MSME competitiveness. By integrating appropriate technology, enhancing human resource capabilities, and fostering collaborative networks, regional fishery-based MSMEs can achieve long-term business sustainability and remain resilient in an increasingly competitive market environment.

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