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Gera-Stone: Development of Renewable Ceramic Media for Quality Enhancement and Product Diversification of Pundong Potter

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ABSTRACT

Traditional pottery centers in Indonesian face challenges related to declining material quality, limited finishing techniques, and low market competitiveness. The Pundong pottery center in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, reflects this condition, where products are generally limited to low-fired bisque wares with low functional and economic value. This research aims to develop and evaluate GERA-STONE, a hybrid ceramic material combining local earthenware clay with stoneware to improve product quality and market acceptance. The study employed a participatory research and development (R&D) approach integrated with practice-based research, involving 30 artisans. The research was conducted in three stages: material development, finishing exploration, and product evaluation through direct market testing in a public exhibition. Data were collected through observation, experimentation, discussions, and market testing, and analyzed descriptively. The results show that GERA-STONE improves structural stability, firing performance, and glaze compatibility. Finishing techniques enhance both aesthetic and functional qualities, enabling products to serve as tableware and home décor. Market testing indicates positive consumer responses, with products achieving prices 300–500% higher than conventional pottery. These findings confirm that innovation in material and technique, supported by participatory processes and market evaluation, can significantly enhance product quality and economic value.

KEYWORDS

Hybrid-Clay, Gera-Stone, Gerabah Pundong, Ceramic Innovation, Glasir

INTRODUCTION

The Pundong pottery center in Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, is an important producer of traditional pottery with strong cultural and historical significance. Its hallmark products are small, cylindrical souvenir ceramics made using handwheel techniques, traditionally used as ritual objects in Javanese culture as well as decorative souvenirs. In recent decades, however, the center has experienced a significant decline in productivity and market competitiveness. A key underlying problem is the deterioration of local clay quality following the discontinuation of Godean soil exploitation, which has led to pottery that is increasingly fragile and visually dull (Suharson et al., 2025). In addition, many products are still marketed in a raw, bisque-fired condition, resulting in low commercial value due to limited innovation in finishing techniques. These challenges are not unique to Pundong. Similar conditions have been observed in other pottery centers in Indonesia, where constraints in material quality and finishing methods continue to hinder product development and market expansion (Wahyuningsih et al., 2023).

In the broader discourse of ceramic and craft development, diversification has been widely recognized as a strategic approach to revitalizing traditional pottery industries. Diversification in

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ceramics encompasses not only variations in form and ornamentation but also diversification of materials, production techniques, product functions, and market orientation (Raharjo, 2009). Studies in Indonesian ceramic and craft research demonstrate that experimentation with materials and techniques plays a crucial role in enhancing the visual character, functional performance, and contemporary relevance of pottery products (Hutagalung, 2019; Iriaji et al., 2019; Simanjuntak, 2018). Likewise, research on contemporary craft-based ceramics indicates that transforming traditional pottery into functional products such as tableware and home décor enables artisans to access broader lifestyle and creative economy markets (Kamal & Granicia, 2023; Raharjo, 2009).

Material diversification, in particular, has been identified as a fundamental driver of quality improvement in ceramic production. Research in ceramic technology explains that clay body composition directly affects mechanical strength, firing stability, and glaze compatibility, which are essential indicators of ceramic quality (Dade, 2017; Peterson & Peterson, 2003). In the Indonesian context, studies on ceramic surface treatment and material exploration reveal that innovations in clay bodies and finishing techniques significantly influence both aesthetic outcomes and functional durability of ceramic products (Kamal & Granicia, 2023; Simanjuntak, 2018). These findings are further supported by archaeological and technological ceramic studies, which show that hybrid ceramic materials can effectively enhance structural integrity and firing performance (Fernandez & Jesus, 2019; Rifai & Hartono, 2017).

Beyond material considerations, diversification of finishing and decorative techniques has also been shown to contribute substantially to value creation in ceramic crafts. Research on contemporary ceramic design highlights that surface treatment, glazing, and decorative techniques not only enrich visual expression but also increase functional value by improving waterproofness, hygiene, and usability of ceramic products (Rhodes, 2015; Risatti, 2009). In Indonesian craft studies, the application of varied surface treatments and decorative strategies is closely linked to the enhancement of perceived quality and product differentiation in competitive markets (Nasution, 2017).

Importantly, several studies in design and creative economy research argue that improvements in product quality through material and technical innovation are closely associated with increased economic value. Products that demonstrate higher durability, refined finishing, and functional versatility tend to achieve higher price positioning and stronger market acceptance. In the context of craft-based industries, this relationship suggests that innovation materials and techniques can serve as a strategic pathway toward economic sustainability for artisan communities, provided that such innovations remain accessible and adaptable to local production conditions (Sihotang, 2016; Simanjuntak, 2018).

Despite the growing literature on ceramic diversification and craft innovation, a significant research gap remains in the systematic development of hybrid ceramic materials for traditional pottery communities in Indonesia. Existing studies largely focus on form, decoration, or socio-cultural aspects of pottery, while research addressing fundamental material engineering through the hybridization of low-fire local clay and high-fire stoneware is still limited. Moreover, few studies integrate material innovation with participatory approaches that actively involve artisans as co-creators in the research and development process.

Responding to this gap, the present research introduces GERA-STONE, a hybrid ceramic material developed through the combination of local Pundong earthenware clay and commercial stoneware. This approach aims to integrate the workability and local identity of traditional clay with the strength, density, and thermal stability of stoneware, enabling high-temperature firing and glaze application without abandoning traditional forming techniques. The material innovation is accompanied by the exploration of finishing and decorative techniques suitable for high-temperature ceramics, allowing traditional Pundong pottery to evolve into contemporary functional products with higher aesthetic and economic value.

Accordingly, the objectives of this research are: (1) to develop and characterize the GERA-STONE hybrid ceramic material through the formulation of local Pundong clay and stoneware, producing a ceramic body that is stable at high firing temperatures and compatible with glazing; (2) to evaluate the application of various finishing and decorative techniques on GERA-STONE material to generate new aesthetic and functional values; and (3) to evaluate the market acceptance and

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economic potential of GERA-STONE ceramic products through direct product evaluation and market testing, conducted via a public exhibition and showroom-based sales environment. Through this approach, the study is expected to contribute to ceramic material innovation while offering a sustainable, community-based model for revitalizing traditional pottery practices in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employed a participatory research and development (R&D) approach integrated with practice-based research within the field of ceramic craft. This methodological combination was selected to ensure that material and technical innovations were developed through systematic experimentation while remaining applicable to the real production context of a traditional pottery community. Practice-based research emphasizes knowledge generation through creative practice, material experimentation, and reflective making, which is particularly relevant in art, design, and craft research (Candy & Edmonds, 2018; Leavy, 2022; Nelson, 2013).

The research was conducted at the Pundong Pottery Center, Bantul Regency, Yogyakarta, involving 30 artisans from the Siti Rejeki pottery group as active collaborators. In line with principles of community-based participatory research (CBPR), artisans were engaged as co-creators throughout the research process, contributing experiential knowledge during material formulation, forming, finishing, and evaluation stages (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler, 2004). Data were collected through participatory observation, visual documentation, experimental records, and focus group discussions. Data analysis employed a descriptive qualitative approach, supported by simple quantitative observations related to material behavior and firing performance. Ethical considerations were addressed by ensuring mutual benefit, shared ownership of knowledge, and transparency throughout the collaborative process.

The research was conducted through three interconnected main stages:

Stage 1: Development of GERA-STONE Ceramic Material

The first stage focused on the formulation and preliminary characterization of GERA-STONE, a hybrid ceramic material developed through the combination of local Pundong earthenware clay and commercial stoneware. Several experimental compositions were tested to evaluate plasticity, workability, and firing performance. Based on iterative trials, a 70:30 ratio (earthenware:stoneware by weight) was identified as the most suitable composition. Clay preparation involved material processing, sieving, controlled mixing, and aging to ensure homogeneity. Prototype forms were produced using traditional handwheel techniques and bisque-fired at approximately 900°C to assess structural integrity and forming suitability.

Stage 2: Exploration of Finishing and Decorative Techniques

The second stage involved experimental exploration of finishing and decorative techniques compatible with the GERA-STONE material. Various glazing approaches, including transparent, white, and oxide-pigmented glazes, were applied using dipping, brushing, and spraying techniques. Decorative surface treatments included nerikomi and marbling (agateware) techniques that emphasized material contrast between the earthenware and stoneware components. Glaze firing was conducted at 1050°C and 1200°C to evaluate glaze maturity, surface quality, and material stability under high-temperature conditions.

Stage 3: Product Evaluation and Market Testing

The final stage focused on product evaluation and direct market testing to assess the market acceptance and economic potential of ceramic products developed using the GERA-STONE material. Product evaluation was conducted through reflective discussions between researchers and artisans, focusing on functional performance, finishing quality, and visual identity. As the culmination of the research, a public exhibition and market test was organized at Ambarrukmo Plaza, Yogyakarta, from 24–30 November 2025. This exhibition functioned as a real-market environment, allowing artisans to evaluate consumer responses, purchasing behavior, and price positioning. Artisans actively participated in showroom layout design, product display arrangement, and consumer interaction, enabling experiential learning related to contemporary market expectations

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and professional sales practices. Market feedback was collected through direct observation, visitor interaction, and comparative price analysis. The outcomes of this stage provided empirical evidence regarding the relationship between material and technical innovation, product quality improvement, and economic value enhancement.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Development of Gera-Stone Ceramic Material

The development of the GERA-STONE ceramic material demonstrated a significant improvement in material performance compared to conventional Pundong earthenware clay. The hybrid composition combining local earthenware clay with stoneware at a ratio of 70:30 resulted in enhanced plasticity, improved structural integrity, and greater firing stability. During the forming process as illustrated in Figure 1, the GERA-STONE material remained compatible with traditional handwheel techniques, indicating that the innovation did not disrupt established artisanal practices.

Figure 1. Gera-Stone Material During Prototype Making
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

After bisque firing at approximately 900°C, GERA-STONE specimens exhibited reduced surface cracking and improved mechanical soundness, as indicated by consistent ring test results (Figure 2). These findings align with ceramic material studies stating that the addition of stoneware components increases vitrification potential and improves mechanical strength at higher firing temperatures (Dade, 2017; Peterson & Peterson, 2003). Similar observations were reported by Fernandez & Jesus (2019), who emphasized that hybrid ceramic bodies tend to achieve better thermal stability and structural cohesion due to balanced mineral composition.

Figure 2. Bisque Firing Result
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

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From a craft development perspective, this material transformation represents a shift from low-fired earthenware limitations toward a more durable ceramic body capable of supporting functional products. According to Dormer (1997), material quality is a foundational determinant of craft value, as it directly influences both functional performance and the perception of craftsmanship. Therefore, the successful formulation of GERA-STONE establishes a critical material basis for subsequent diversification of products and market orientation.

In-depth analysis of test samples revealed that the integration of stoneware successfully addressed the brittleness that was the primary weakness of the pure local clay. The ring test produced a clear, high-pitched sound, indicating a compact and homogeneous internal structure. More notably, visual observation of the product surfaces revealed the emergence of natural speckles and textures resulting from mineral reactions between the iron oxide-rich local clay and the silica components in the stoneware. This phenomenon not only serves as evidence of successful material integration but also creates a unique aesthetic value that becomes a distinctive characteristic of GERA-STONE products, as illustrated in Figure 3.

Figure 3. High-Temperature Firing Results of Gera-Stone (Natural Speckles)
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

The technical characteristics of this material proved stable at high temperatures and compatible with food-grade glaze firing processes, thereby expanding the potential of traditional pottery products into the realm of modern functional ceramics. This fundamental transformation overcomes the primary limitations of conventional Pundong pottery, which was previously only capable of low-temperature firing and marketed in bisque condition with limited commercial value. High-temperature firing at 1200-1250°C demonstrates that the GERA-STONE body maintains its structural integrity without deformation, melting, or bloating, while exhibiting significant improvements in density and mechanical strength.

2. Exploration of Finishing and Decorative Techniques

The study successfully developed various innovative finishing approaches suited to the characteristics of the GERA-STONE material. Intensive experimentation with nerikomi and marbling techniques resulted in organic visual patterns that resemble natural rock textures, utilizing the natural color contrast between the reddish pottery clay and the lighter stoneware. The use of oxide pigments such as cobalt, copper, and iron in these techniques enriched color variation without compromising the local material identity.

In glaze application, a comprehensive evaluation of artisan preferences revealed that transparent glaze was the primary choice. This decision was based on aesthetic awareness that the natural color and texture of GERA-STONE material already possess substantial visual appeal. Transparent glaze allows the material's unique characteristics to remain exposed while providing the functional protection and waterproof properties required for modern product standards. This approach also proved effective as a pedagogical strategy, as it facilitated artisans' understanding of basic glazing principles without excessive technical complexity.

The exploration of glaze application techniques included dipping, spraying, and brushing

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methods, each producing distinct visual characteristics. The dipping technique provided solid and consistent coverage, ideal for functional products like tableware. Spray application yielded even layers with attractive depth effects, while brush techniques produced lively and expressive artistic brushstrokes. Experiments with overlapping techniques, such as spraying cobalt glaze over a white base, successfully achieved highly aesthetic color complexity and gradation.

Figure 4. Glaze Application Process Using Spray Technique
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

Figure 5. Nerikomi Technique
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

Decorative techniques such as nerikomi and marbling (agateware) successfully highlighted the visual contrast between earthenware and stoneware components, generating distinctive surface patterns that were previously unattainable with conventional local clay (Figure 5). These findings are consistent with ceramic surface theory, which emphasizes that surface treatment and glazing function as both aesthetic and functional enhancers by improving impermeability, hygiene, and durability (Rhodes, 2015; Risatti, 2009). In contemporary ceramic design discourse, finishing techniques are recognized as a primary medium for material expression and product differentiation, particularly in functional ceramics such as tableware and interior décor (Peterson & Peterson, 2003).

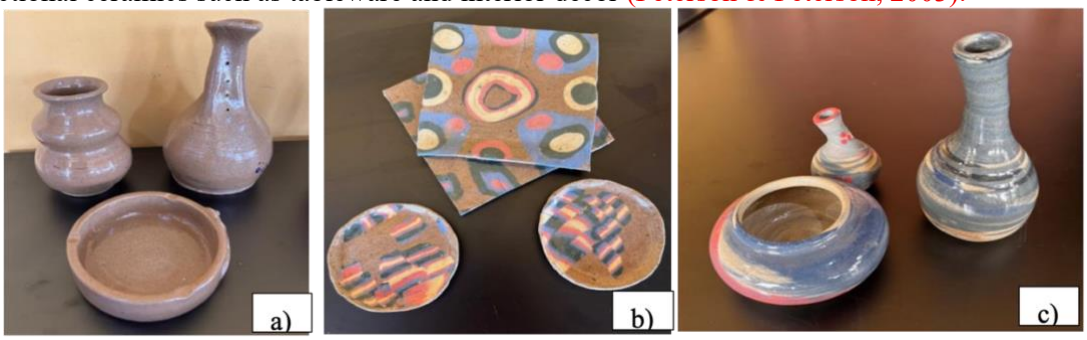

Figure 6. Glazing Results: a) Transparent Glossy Glaze; b) Nerikomi Glaze; c) Marbling Glaze (Agateware)
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

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Within the context of Indonesian craft development, Raharjo (2009) argue that innovation in surface treatment significantly contributes to perceived product quality and market competitiveness. The application of high-temperature glazes on GERA-STONE material therefore not only enhanced visual aesthetics but also expanded the functional possibilities of Pundong pottery, enabling its transformation into products suitable for daily use and lifestyle markets.

3. Product Evaluation and Market Testing

The third stage focused on product evaluation and direct market testing as a critical step to assess the commercial feasibility and market acceptance of ceramic products developed using the GERA-STONE material. This stage functioned as a bridge between technical innovation and real market performance, ensuring that improvements in material and finishing were meaningfully translated into economic value. Product evaluation was conducted through a combination of internal reflection sessions and public exhibition-based assessment. Internal evaluations involved discussions between researchers and artisans to review product quality, functional performance, finishing consistency, and visual identity. These sessions encouraged reflective learning, allowing artisans to critically assess their own work and identify areas for refinement. Such reflective evaluation processes are central to practice-based research, where knowledge is generated through cycles of making, reflection, and contextual testing (Candy & Edmonds, 2018; Nelson, 2013).

Figure 7. Internal product evaluation session involving artisans and researchers, focusing on quality assessment and reflective discussion.
Source: (Suharson, 2025)

As the culmination of the research activities, a public exhibition and market test was held at Ambarrukmo Plaza, Yogyakarta, from 24–30 November 2025. Ambarrukmo Plaza was strategically selected as one of the largest shopping centers in Yogyakarta, with a visitor profile dominated by middle- to upper-middle-class consumers. This context provided a realistic testing ground for evaluating how GERA-STONE ceramic products performed within contemporary consumer markets. During the exhibition, artisans were actively involved in the design and arrangement of the showroom display, including layout planning, display pattern design, and product grouping. The display emphasized clarity of product function, material quality, and visual coherence, enabling visitors to engage with the products more effectively. Previous studies in craft and design marketing highlight that display strategies significantly influence consumer perception and perceived product value, particularly in gallery and exhibition contexts (Manzini, 2015).

In addition to visual presentation, artisans practiced professional consumer interaction, learning how to communicate product narratives, material advantages, and functional benefits to potential buyers. This interaction allowed artisans to directly observe consumer responses, preferences, and purchasing behavior. Feedback was collected informally through conversations, visitor comments, and observed buying decisions. Such direct engagement aligns with market-

oriented craft development models that emphasize learning from real consumer behavior rather than simulated assessments (Dormer, 1997).

The market testing results indicated a positive reception of GERA-STONE products, particularly for functional items such as tableware and home décor. Visitors demonstrated greater appreciation for products that combined refined glazing, functional usability, and contemporary aesthetics. Comparative price analysis showed that GERA-STONE products were able to achieve selling prices approximately 300–500% higher than conventional bisque-fired Pundong pottery. This increase in economic value supports theoretical arguments that innovation in material and technique enhances both perceived and actual product quality, which in turn elevates market positioning (Manzini, 2015; Raharjo, 2009). Furthermore, emphasizes that craft products capable of entering lifestyle and creative economy markets typically exhibit strong alignment between material quality, functional relevance, and narrative value, attributes that were evident in the GERA-STONE products showcased during the exhibition.

Beyond economic outcomes, the market testing stage also contributed to artisan capacity building. By directly engaging with contemporary consumers, artisans developed a deeper understanding of modern consumer behavior, market expectations, and adaptive design strategies. This experiential learning process reinforces the notion that sustainable craft development requires not only technical proficiency but also market literacy and adaptive capability (Israel et al., 1998; Minkler, 2004). Overall, the integration of product evaluation and direct market testing confirmed that innovations in ceramic material and finishing techniques can significantly improve product quality and economic value when supported by effective presentation and market engagement strategies. The exhibition-based market test thus validated the GERA-STONE approach as a viable model for strengthening the competitiveness and sustainability of traditional pottery within the dynamic ecosystem of the creative economy.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that innovation in ceramic materials and finishing techniques can effectively improve product quality and economic value in traditional pottery. The development of GERA-STONE, a hybrid material combining local earthenware and stoneware, successfully enhanced structural stability, firing performance, and compatibility with high-temperature glazing while remaining suitable for traditional forming techniques.

The application of advanced finishing and decorative techniques expanded both the aesthetic and functional qualities of the products, enabling their transformation into durable and usable tableware and home décor. More importantly, product evaluation and direct market testing through a public exhibition confirmed that these improvements significantly increased market acceptance and economic value, with products achieving higher price positioning compared to conventional pottery.

This study also highlights the importance of participatory and practice-based approaches in craft development, where artisans actively engage in innovation and market interaction. Such an approach not only strengthens technical capacity but also enhances market awareness. Overall, the GERA-STONE model provides a practical and sustainable strategy for revitalizing traditional pottery and improving its competitiveness within the contemporary creative economy.

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