

SECTION: SOCIOLOGICAL SCIENCES.

SEKCJA: NAUKI SOCJOLOGICZNE.

How to cite: Hizriani, N. (2023). Empowering the Community through International Community Service Learning in Southern Thailand: Harmony of Culture and Language. *Global Innovations and Collaborative Solutions in Contemporary Science* (pp. 416-420). Futurity Research Publishing. https://futurity-publishing.com/international_conference_3

Empowering the Community through International Community Service Learning in Southern Thailand: Harmony of Culture and Language

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Accepted: December 11, 2023 | **Published:** December 15, 2023 | **Language:** English

Abstract: This paper examines the International Community Service Learning (CSL) program by Antasari State Islamic University students in Southern Thailand. It focuses on promoting community empowerment, cultural harmony, and language development. The CSL program bridges academic knowledge with societal needs through initiatives in three-language education, Islamic outreach, and cultural preservation. The study highlights the program's success in fostering global perspectives and achieving educational, cultural, and community development goals.

Keywords: Community Empowerment, Community Service Learning, Southern Thailand.

Introduction

Social changes are inseparable from the role of higher education, pivotal in shaping a society capable of adapting to the complexities of global challenges. The Community Service Learning (CSL) program, a form of field education, provides students with practical experience in engaging with communities beyond the campus. This program directly teaches them to identify and address social issues (Claes et al., 2022). Functioning as an educational innovation, the program empowers students to contribute significantly to global problem-solving. It motivates them to become agents of change, effectively bridging the gap

between academic knowledge and community needs. Empowering communities through CSL programs strategically enhances student involvement in addressing community needs and solving problems within their available resources and capabilities (Matzembacher et al., 2019; Mogford & Lyons, 2019). The International CSL program at Antasari State Islamic University (UIN Antasari) is implemented under the International Learning Independence Campus Teaching (MBKM) concept. It mandates students to participate in a month-long community service at Ma'had Al-Bi'sat Addiniyah and Ma'had Al Irsyad lil-Banat Thamavitya Mulniti School in Yala Province, Thailand.

This study seeks to assess how the International Community Service Learning (CSL) activities influence students' engagement in diverse cultural communities, appraise the enhancement of students' Islamic preaching abilities within the program, and gauge the effectiveness of introducing Banjar culture and the Indonesian language to the local community. Additionally, it aims to compare the International CSL program at UIN Antasari with global standards and assess its impact on community development.

The qualitative research design employed in this study, which involves interviews with participants and focus groups to gather in-depth insights into their experiences and perceptions. Additionally, document analysis of program-related documents, such as reports and reflections, were conducted to supplement the qualitative findings. The data are used to provide a comprehensive and robust understanding of the outcomes of the International Community Service Learning program at UIN Antasari, particularly in relation to student engagement, Islamic preaching development, and the introduction of culture and language to the local community.

This study holds significance for academia, educational institutions, and communities by providing insights into the impact of international community service learning on students and the communities they serve, emphasizing cultural understanding, language development, and community empowerment.

The purpose - to present a comprehensive examination of the International Community Service Learning (CSL) program conducted by students from Antasari State Islamic University in Southern Thailand.

The objectives are:

- 1) to showcase how the CSL program promotes community empowerment, cultural harmony, and language development;
- 2) to demonstrate the integration of academic knowledge with societal needs, particularly in three-language education, Islamic outreach, and cultural preservation;
- 3) to highlight the program's effectiveness in fostering global perspectives and achieving significant progress in educational, cultural, and community development. These conference materials aim to disseminate these insights to a scholarly audience, contributing to broader discussions on the role of community service learning in global education contexts.

Research Results

The International CSL program at UIN Antasari was conducted in Yala Province, Southern Thailand, in 2023. Yala, one of the four provinces in Thailand with a significant Muslim population along with Pattani, Narathiwat, and Songkhla, was chosen for its interesting social diversity and rich cultural heritage. This region, bordering Malaysia and inhabited by the Malay-Muslim ethnic group, has experienced significant changes in its language and culture since the Thai government implemented an assimilation program. The Malay language, while no longer the official language in government, is still used for Islamic religious knowledge, ceremonies, and oral communication among the Malay people. The program aims to provide students with opportunities to actively participate in various international activities within diverse cultural communities, develop Islamic preaching, and introduce Banjar culture and the Indonesian language to

the local community. Additionally, it serves as a benchmark for developing community service programs at UIN Antasari to meet international standards and achieve measurable results.

Community empowerment conceptually involves social actions where a community organizes itself into joint plans and activities to solve social problems or meet social needs according to its capabilities and resources (Sumodiningrat, 2009; Zastrow et al., 2019; Ledwith, 2020). Furthermore, the Minister of Home Affairs Regulation of the Republic of Indonesia No. 7 of 2007 on Community Empowerment Cadres states that community empowerment is a strategy used in community development efforts to achieve capacity and independence in societal, national, and state life (Article 1, paragraph 8) (retrieved from Md Safian, 2007). In other words, community empowerment is a strategy to realize the capacity and independence of the community.

This concept is closely related to the role of 12 UIN Antasari students in the International CSL activities in Ma'had Al-Bi'sat Addiniyah and Ma'had Al Irsyad lil-Banat Thamavitya Mulniti School in Yala. The following are programs implemented by students during the International CSL activities in Southern Thailand:

Three-Language Learning Program

During the implementation of the International CSL program in Islamic schools in Southern Thailand, students collaborated with teachers to design a trilingual learning program in Indonesian, English, and Arabic. Students majoring in education worked with teachers at Ma'had Al-Bi'sat Addiniyah and Ma'had Al Irsyad lil-Banat to develop engaging language teaching techniques and methods. The program focused on developing speaking, listening, reading, and writing skills in these three languages, while also integrating Islamic contexts with Malay, Banjar, and Indonesian cultural elements. The goal was to enable students to apply their language knowledge practically in various classroom activities, thereby supporting multilingual understanding and deepening cultural awareness. Educational empowerment programs, particularly those in language development, aim to enhance the quality of education within the community (Chotimah et al., 2018; Prasetya et al., 2018).

Islamic Outreach

International CSL students actively participated in spreading and introducing Islamic values, teachings, and practices to the Yala community. They demonstrated behaviors and practices aligned with Islamic values, contributing to the moral and character building of students. Additionally, they engaged in religious activities such as congregational prayers, religious studies, routine meetings, and Islamic preaching via local radio stations. This was crucial in a region with a predominantly Muslim population like Southern Thailand, where there is a strong desire to preserve Islamic values as guiding principles for students across generations. Through Islamic outreach, an increase in the community's knowledge and understanding of Islam is expected, encouraging active participation in religious activities and a continuous deepening of religious understanding (Alam & Aqbar, 2020; KKN (Community Service Program) Yala – Thailand, n.d.). Such increased awareness of Islamic values can strengthen Islamic identity and foster good character within the community.

Preservation of Malay Culture and Introduction of Banjar Culture

One of the cultural activities conducted by International CSL students was introducing the use of the traditional musical instrument, the "kompang," to students. Kompang is a type of drum used by the Malay people, including the Banjar, for Islamic performances. The Banjar community recognizes this art form as "terbang" or Hadrah. The musical instrument accompanies the recitation of the "shalawat," fostering enthusiasm and the spirit of Islamic art (Syarifah & Ali, 2023). The use of kompang or terbang indirectly introduces the Hadrah Banjari, popularized by Abah Guru Sekumpul Muhammad Zaini bin Abdul Gani

(Waqfin et al., 2021). In a different context, students also introduced the process of making "sasirangan," a traditional fabric from South Kalimantan. The above programs demonstrate that students, as academic members, play a crucial role in community development (Shaturaev, 2021; Zastrow & Hessenauer, 2022). The concept of community empowerment, according to Sulistiyani (2004), covering enabling development, empowering potential or power, and achieving independence, has been realized. Firstly, the enabling aspect is reflected in efforts to create a learning environment that supports the growth and development of the local community. CSL students can contribute to creating an atmosphere that allows local potential to thrive by listening to and understanding the needs and culture of the Southern Thai community. Secondly, the International CSL program can strengthen the potential and power of the community by actively involving them in planning and implementing activities. Students can share their knowledge and skills with the local community, empowering them to better address challenges and utilize existing opportunities. Thirdly, the creation of community independence. Through active community participation in development and teaching activities conducted by students, an improvement in the community's ability to manage resources and solve their own problems is expected. Thus, the program contributes to the creation of independence at the local level. Through the International CSL program, the community empowerment targets mentioned by Mardikanto and Soebianto (2012), including better education, better accessibility, better action, better institutions, better environment, and better community, can be achieved. Through this approach, it is hoped that the community involved in the International CSL program can become more independent, possess broader skills and knowledge, and better manage their own lives.

Conclusions

The International CSL program in Southern Thailand, led by students from UIN Antasari, has brought about positive changes in community empowerment, the introduction of Banjar culture, and improvements in education and Islamic outreach. This program's unique approach to three-language learning, Islamic outreach, and the preservation of Malay culture through Hadrah Banjari art, has created an engaging and enjoyable learning environment, positively affecting the local Islamic identity. These positive impacts are anticipated to be lasting, influencing community empowerment, cultural preservation, and education over the long term. As an exemplary international implementation of the MBKM concept, the program sets high standards for community service and provides students with a global perspective. Furthermore, the study offers lessons for similar programs worldwide, emphasizing the importance of understanding cultures and engaging with communities in service. By acknowledging the challenges encountered and resolved, the conclusion presents a comprehensive view of the program's success. Exploring opportunities for improvement or expansion, based on the lessons learned, contributes to a realistic perspective, and encourages continual growth in future initiatives.

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