

Enhancing Students' Life Skills through Cross-Cultural Education and Collaboration between Indonesia and Thailand

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Abstract

The Sharing non-governmental organization actively facilitates collaboration among Indonesian academics through International Community Service (PKM) initiatives as a realization of the Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi. This program, which has been implemented four times, recently engaged hundreds of participants from various Indonesian universities in partnership with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur, PPI UPSI Malaysia, and higher education institutions in Indonesia and Malaysia. Guided by national education regulations, including Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System and Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education, this PKM program aims to apply academic knowledge, foster entrepreneurship, and address social challenges, particularly in empowering Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). The activities employed hybrid approaches combining online and offline workshops, training, and interactive discussions focused on improving participants' life skills in health, entrepreneurship, financial management, foreign language proficiency, and cross-cultural understanding. The program was held at Lukmanulhakeem School in Yala, Thailand, involving lecturers and students from Universitas PGRI Palembang and partner universities. The results revealed multidimensional benefits: (1) developing leadership and collaboration skills among students and lecturers; (2) strengthening institutional networks and accreditation for universities; and (3) providing tangible contributions to society and government through the empowerment of migrant workers. Moving forward, this initiative is expected to continue each semester in various countries with enhanced content, strategic partnerships, and innovative methods to broaden its social and educational impact.

Keywords: International Community Service; Migrant Worker Empowerment; Life Skills; Academic Collaboration; Tridharma of Higher Education.

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Introduction

Education plays a crucial role in shaping the life skills required for individuals to adapt and succeed in increasingly complex societies (Rani, 2025). In the era of globalization, students are not only expected to possess academic knowledge but also social, emotional, and cultural skills that support effective cross-cultural interactions (Kawalekar, 2017). These life skills, such as communication, collaboration, and understanding cultural differences, are becoming increasingly important in preparing younger generations to face global challenges (Bharti, 2023). Therefore, a holistic and inclusive education is essential to empower students in diverse social contexts and enable them to become adaptive, responsible, and globally competent citizens (Sriatun et al., 2024).

Cross-cultural collaboration in education serves as an effective approach to enhancing students' life skills (Borinshteyn & Orlenko, 2020). Through interactions with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds, students can broaden their perspectives, strengthen empathy, and build mutually respectful relationships (Machynska & Derkach, 2016). Programs that facilitate cultural exchanges and shared learning experiences not only enrich students' academic knowledge but also enhance their social competencies, tolerance, and cultural sensitivity (Kelemen, 2023). Consequently, cross-cultural collaboration becomes an essential means of equipping students with relevant skills for daily life, higher education, and future professional careers (Sukri, 2024; M. Ikhsan U et al., 2025).

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The importance of developing life skills through education and cross-cultural collaboration extends beyond the individual level to society as a whole (Sfinteş, 2023). Students who possess strong life skills are expected to contribute positively to their communities, fostering inclusive and harmonious social environments and helping to strengthen national resilience (Sudha, 2020). In this regard, higher education institutions are challenged to not only produce graduates with strong cognitive competencies but also to implement community-oriented programs that cultivate empathy, leadership, and cooperation across cultural boundaries.

To realize the ideals of the Higher Education Law that promotes collaboration as part of the Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi, the non-governmental organization Sharing has taken an active role in facilitating Indonesian academics to collaborate through International Community Service (PKM) activities. This program represents the third and fourth implementation of International PKM, following the first initiative in July 2023 and the second from September to December 2023 (Suryani et al., 2025). The first International PKM, conducted in Malaysia, involved 230 participants from 31 Indonesian universities and was coordinated by a temporary collaboration group named Community Service Community Collaboration (KOMPAK) (LSM Sharing, 2025).

The second International PKM (Malaysia) expanded significantly, engaging 263 participants from 115 universities in Indonesia, facilitated by the Sharing organization in partnership with the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) Kuala Lumpur, PPI UPSI Malaysia, and universities across Indonesia and Malaysia (LSM & KBRI, 2023). Sharing, which operates under legal recognition through Notary Deed No. 38/2007 (Notary GOMSALATI, Bachelor of Law), has continuously worked to support academic collaboration in alignment with its mission to promote educational advancement and provide equitable learning opportunities for Indonesian and international communities. Through these initiatives, Sharing mobilizes academic volunteers from various universities in Indonesia to make positive contributions to international communities, particularly in addressing social challenges and promoting sustainable human development. This collaborative effort aims to build a resilient, progressive, and globally aware society. The organization plans to continue implementing International PKM programs every semester in various destination countries, thereby ensuring continuity and wider impact across regions.

The implementation of Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat (PKM) in Indonesia is grounded in a strong legal framework regulated by national educational policies (LSM Sharing, 2007). The primary foundations include Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (Republik Indonesia, 2003), Government Regulation No. 37 of 2009 on Lecturers, and Law No. 12 of 2012 on Higher Education (Republik Indonesia, 2009, 2012). Furthermore, PKM activities also refer to the Regulation of the Minister of Education and Culture No. 3 of 2020 on National Standards for Higher Education (Kemendikbud, 2020), and the Regulation of the Minister of Religious Affairs No. 55 of 2014 on Research and Community Service in Religious Universities (Kementerian Agama RI, 2014). These legal foundations position PKM as an integral component of the Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi, inseparable from teaching and research, and involving the active participation of lecturers, students, educational staff, and alumni.

Specifically, PKM aims to apply science, technology, art, and culture to improve community life, particularly through the application of research-based and practical innovations (Admin, 2025; Noor, 2010; Ramdhanivera, 2016; Rosadi et al., 2022; Ruangbit, 2020). This activity is also directed at strengthening entrepreneurial capacities within society, government institutions, the private sector, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) (Fitriani, 2022; Nurhalita & others, 2022; Setyawan et al., 2025). Additionally, PKM programs aim to raise awareness of sustainable development, assist communities in disaster management, and promote local empowerment toward independence and prosperity (Husamah, 2024; La Patilaya et al., 2022; Susanti et al., 2025). Therefore, PKM not only emphasizes the application of academic knowledge but also focuses on empowering communities to achieve sustainable and equitable growth.

The benefits of PKM are evident for multiple stakeholders, including the academic community, universities, and the broader society (Maulida, 2024; Riduwan, 2016). For students and lecturers, PKM provides an opportunity to practice leadership, enhance problem-solving and communication skills, foster teamwork, and embody their academic and social responsibilities. For universities, PKM functions as a platform for strengthening partnerships with communities, improving accreditation outcomes, enhancing institutional visibility, and expanding networks (Triharyati et al., 2022). Meanwhile, for the government and society, PKM signifies higher education's direct contribution to national development, especially in remote or marginalized regions requiring academic intervention (Puspa et al., 2024).

Accordingly, PKM acts as a bridge between the academic world and societal needs, transforming higher education from a theoretical domain into a practical driver of community empowerment and development.

Method

This Community Service Research (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat or PKM) employed a comprehensive and structured methodological approach to achieve the goal of empowering Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Thailand. The implementation combined qualitative and participatory methods, emphasizing active engagement, collaboration, and reflection among participants. The approach was designed to ensure that each stage of the activity contributed effectively to the improvement of participants' life skills and the strengthening of cross-cultural understanding. The main methodological stages are as follows:

a. Preparation and Needs Analysis

The preliminary stage involved coordination with relevant stakeholders, including Lembaga Swadaya Masyarakat Sharing, the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Kuala Lumpur, and Lukmanulhakeem School in Yala, Thailand. A brief survey and online interviews were conducted to identify the primary needs of PMI in terms of health, entrepreneurship, financial literacy, and language proficiency. This needs assessment served as the foundation for determining the training modules and materials to be delivered during the PKM activities.

b. Training and Workshops

Both online and offline training sessions were organized to enhance the life skills of PMI. The learning modules focused on four main areas: (a) health and personal well-being; (b) entrepreneurship and small business management; (c) financial literacy and budgeting; and (d) foreign language and intercultural communication. Interactive instructional techniques such as case-based learning, role-playing, and problem-solving activities were applied to ensure participants' active engagement and comprehension. This approach enabled PMI to acquire not only theoretical knowledge but also practical competencies applicable to their daily lives.

c. Discussions and Q&A Sessions

To foster a two-way learning process, open discussions and question-and-answer sessions were held following each training topic. These sessions allowed participants to share experiences, express challenges faced in their working environments, and obtain direct clarification from the facilitators. The discussions also provided valuable qualitative data that informed ongoing adjustments to the training content, ensuring relevance and contextual accuracy.

d. Hybrid Implementation Model

The program utilized a hybrid delivery model combining both online and offline methods. The offline component was conducted at Lukmanulhakeem School, Yala, Thailand, involving direct participation from PMI, lecturers, and students of Universitas PGRI Palembang and partner universities. The online component was facilitated through digital platforms such as Zoom and WhatsApp groups to accommodate participants located in remote areas. This hybrid strategy was adopted to maximize participation, ensure inclusivity, and maintain program continuity across geographical boundaries.

e. Strategic Collaboration and Partnership

Collaboration was established with various institutions and stakeholders, including the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Kuala Lumpur, the Indonesian Student Association (PPI UPSI Malaysia), and several higher education institutions in Indonesia and Thailand. These partnerships enhanced the credibility of the program, provided logistical and institutional support, and contributed to the exchange of knowledge between participating institutions. Through these collaborations, the program fostered a sustainable model for future cross-border PKM activities.

f. Evaluation and Reflection

Post-activity evaluations were conducted to assess the effectiveness of the methods and the impact on participants' life skills. Evaluation instruments included participant feedback forms, structured interviews, and reflective discussions with facilitators. The assessment focused on three dimensions: (1) participants' satisfaction with the program; (2) perceived improvement in life skills; and (3) sustainability of the acquired competencies. Feedback collected from participants was analyzed qualitatively to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement in future PKM initiatives.

Through this systematic and participatory approach, the PKM program successfully integrated elements of education, collaboration, and empowerment. The methodology not only provided direct benefits to PMI in Thailand but also established a replicable framework for future international community service projects. The findings from the evaluation phase demonstrate that this method effectively supports the development of practical life skills, enhances intercultural competence, and strengthens academic collaboration between Indonesia and Thailand.

Results and Discussion

The implementation of the Community Service Program (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat or PKM) aimed at empowering Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Thailand has successfully achieved its primary objectives. The hybrid learning model combining online and offline activities proved effective in increasing participants' life skills, confidence, and cultural adaptability. Training and workshops conducted under this program covered several essential themes, including health awareness, entrepreneurship, financial management, and foreign language communication. Each session adopted interactive approaches such as discussions, simulations, and contextual exercises, which helped participants actively engage with the material. As a result, participants reported feeling more confident and capable of facing everyday challenges in a foreign environment due to improved understanding of practical and socio-cultural issues.

The interactive discussion and question-and-answer sessions became key elements of this PKM initiative. These sessions created a two-way learning environment where participants shared their real-life experiences and challenges, particularly related to employment, financial stability, and social adaptation. The feedback gathered during these sessions was highly valuable, as it revealed the specific needs of PMI communities and demonstrated that the training content aligned with their expectations and daily realities. The incorporation of such participatory elements reflects the principles of adult learning, emphasizing relevance, collaboration, and problem-solving.

Strategic collaboration with multiple stakeholders, such as the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia (KBRI) in Kuala Lumpur, local Thai educational institutions, and Universitas PGRI Palembang, played a vital role in ensuring the program's success. These partnerships expanded the program's reach, enhanced its credibility, and facilitated access to PMI communities. They also fostered inter-institutional cooperation, which is essential for sustaining similar programs in the future. The success of this collaboration demonstrates the practical value of cross-border educational engagement as part of the Tridharma Perguruan Tinggi framework.

The results of the evaluation indicate that participants experienced substantial improvements in multiple domains. First, in terms of health literacy, PMI gained better awareness of preventive healthcare, nutrition, and mental well-being topics that are often neglected due to limited access to information abroad. Second, entrepreneurial and financial literacy training equipped participants with practical knowledge of savings, small business management, and household budgeting. These competencies are crucial for improving economic resilience both during and after their employment period. Third, foreign language proficiency, particularly in English and Thai, significantly improved, enabling better communication with employers and local residents. Participants expressed that the ability to communicate more effectively contributed to reduced workplace misunderstandings and stronger interpersonal relationships.

In addition to technical competencies, the PKM activities also contributed to the development of soft skills such as teamwork, leadership, adaptability, and problem-solving. These skills emerged naturally through group tasks, collaborative discussions, and reflective sessions. The integration of cultural awareness in the training further supported PMI in adapting to local norms, avoiding potential conflicts, and fostering positive intercultural relations. The exposure to Thai cultural values encouraged mutual respect and strengthened PMI's ability to build harmonious relationships with the host community.

Another important finding was the enhancement of self-efficacy and independence among participants. After the completion of the program, most PMI expressed higher confidence in managing daily life, decision-making, and communication in multicultural contexts. This aligns with previous studies emphasizing that empowerment-based community education contributes to personal and social transformation through increased self-reliance and agency. The participants' testimonies confirmed that the knowledge and skills gained were applicable to both their professional and personal lives, reflecting the tangible impact of the PKM intervention. The evaluation stage involved collecting

feedback using structured questionnaires and reflective discussions. The majority of participants rated the program as highly relevant and beneficial. They highlighted improvements in understanding their rights as migrant workers, awareness of legal protection, and strategies for maintaining financial stability. This feedback serves as a foundation for refining future PKM initiatives, particularly in tailoring materials and delivery methods to address diverse community contexts.

Overall, the PKM program demonstrated that combining hybrid learning, collaborative engagement, and culturally adaptive methods can significantly enhance community empowerment outcomes. The program's success also underscores the importance of academic collaboration between Indonesian and Thai institutions in realizing sustainable international service-learning initiatives. In the long term, this model can be replicated or adapted in other countries hosting Indonesian migrant workers to strengthen global networks of educational and humanitarian collaboration. Furthermore, the findings open opportunities for extended research into the long-term effects of such training. Future studies could employ longitudinal monitoring to measure the sustained application of acquired skills after participants return to Indonesia. This would help assess the durability of empowerment outcomes and the program's broader social and economic impact. Continuous evaluation and adaptive design will ensure that PKM activities remain relevant, inclusive, and transformative in addressing real-world challenges faced by migrant workers.



Figure 1. Offline Implementation of the PKM Program at Lukmanulhakeem School, Yala, Thailand

Conclusions

The results of this Community Service Program (Pengabdian kepada Masyarakat or PKM) clearly indicate that the initiative to empower Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) in Thailand has effectively achieved its objectives. The hybrid model of implementation, combining online and offline learning, proved to be a relevant and impactful strategy in improving participants' life skills and adaptive capacities. The training programs, which covered topics in health, entrepreneurship, financial management, and communication, contributed significantly to participants' self-development. As a result, PMI reported increased confidence, better preparedness to address challenges in their workplace and daily lives, and improved ability to integrate into the local cultural environment. The success of this program also demonstrates the essential role of multi-stakeholder collaboration. Partnerships between higher education institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia have created a sustainable model for international community service initiatives. These collaborations not only facilitated the transfer of knowledge but also strengthened academic diplomacy and socio-cultural relations between Indonesia and Thailand.

Furthermore, the outcomes of this PKM highlight the importance of continuous evaluation and innovation in community service programs. Regular assessment and adjustment of training materials, based on participant feedback and contextual needs, will ensure that future initiatives remain relevant, inclusive, and transformative. This project has thus provided a practical model for future empowerment programs, particularly those targeting Indonesian migrant

communities abroad, by integrating educational, social, and cultural dimensions within a participatory framework. Overall, the program's success reinforces the broader vision of higher education's Tridharma mandate, demonstrating that academic institutions can play a direct and measurable role in community empowerment, cross-cultural understanding, and global citizenship development. With consistent collaboration and commitment, similar initiatives can continue to expand their positive impact regionally and internationally.

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