

Building Leadership and Skills through International Community Service: Lessons from Hat Yai, Thailand

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ABSTRACT

This international community service program aims to implement the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework, focusing on five dimensions: competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring. The methods combined interactive workshops, structured presentations, group discussions, practical simulations, and cross-cultural approaches involving Indonesian and Thai facilitators. The program was conducted at Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, Hat Yai, Thailand, with teachers and students as participants. Observations showed significant improvements in attitudes, skills, and knowledge, with the highest achievement in attitudes, confirming the effectiveness of cultural exchange. These findings imply that cross-cultural learning can serve as a holistic and inclusive strategy for youth development, strengthening both personal growth and global competitiveness.

INTRODUCTION

Youth empowerment is a crucial agenda in preparing the next generation to face the challenges of globalization and the digital era. Strengthening leadership, digital competence, and intercultural communication skills are essential factors to ensure that youth can act as active agents of change in their communities. International community service programs provide a strategic platform to achieve these objectives as they combine knowledge transfer, cultural exchange, and practical engagement.

Several studies have confirmed the role of youth development and community service in shaping positive outcomes. Drawing from the perspective of Positive Youth Development (PYD), youth programs have been shown to enhance life satisfaction and reduce risk behaviors by fostering social, emotional, and moral capacities (Shek et al., 2019).

In the context of community service, research in the Philippines revealed that students' motivation to engage in service is mainly influenced by education, safety, and environmental preservation, with teaching and cooking being dominant skills practiced (John Mark R. Asio et al., 2023). Similarly, a community-based action research on literacy in Olongapo City highlighted the importance of evidence-based practice, stakeholder engagement, and reflective processes to ensure sustainability of community interventions (Paguio et al., 2025). Meanwhile, digital empowerment is also critical for today's youth. A study in Jakarta developed a model of digital literacy for underprivileged youth, focusing on four key aspects: digital skills, digital safety, digital ethics, and digital culture (Novanana, 2022). Furthermore, entrepreneurship education research in Penang, Malaysia, demonstrated the effectiveness of interactive and practical training sessions in enhancing creativity, critical thinking, and entrepreneurial motivation among teenagers (Ode Rayyani et al., n.d.).

The venue for this service program was Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, a private Islamic-based educational institution located at 93/2 Moo 1, Tambon Sumnuktaew, Sadao District, Hat Yai, Thailand. The school plays a significant role in shaping local youth education by integrating religious values with modern knowledge. It is recognized for fostering discipline, academic growth, and cross-cultural understanding, which makes it an ideal partner for international collaboration. This International Community Service program titled "Building Leadership and Youth Skills through International Community Service: Lessons from Hat Yai, Thailand" was designed to strengthen leadership, digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and civic awareness among students. Its contribution lies in offering an interdisciplinary skill set and a novelty aspect through a cross-border approach that combines educational practices from Indonesian universities with the Thai context, creating a holistic model of youth empowerment.

IMPLEMENTATION AND METHODS

Location, Time, and Participants

The program was conducted at Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, Tambon Sumnuktaew, Sadao District, Hat Yai, Thailand, on May 16, 2025, for a one-day intensive session. Participants consisted of 70 middle school students aged 13–16 years, who showed strong interest in youth leadership, digital technology, and cross-cultural entrepreneurship.

The approach applied was an intervention based on positive youth development (PYD), emphasizing the strengthening of competence, confidence, character, social connection, and caring often referred to as the Five Cs. This framework has been proven effective in youth community programs to foster positive development and engagement. The approach applied was an intervention based on positive youth development (PYD), emphasizing the strengthening of competence, confidence, character, social connection, and caring often referred to as the Five Cs. This framework has been proven effective in youth community programs to foster positive development and engagement (Shek et al., 2019)

The program design included:

1. Workshops: combining presentations, small group discussions, and practical simulations.
2. Cross-Cultural Approach: each session was co-moderated alternately by Indonesian facilitators and Thai teachers to enhance intercultural understanding and collaboration.

Materials Delivered

The program consisted of four thematic sessions:

Table 1. Materials Delivered

Session	Topics & Materials	Objectives
1	PYD & Leadership – introducing PYD concepts, self-awareness, and leadership motivation	To nurture an inclusive leadership mindset
2	Digital Literacy – covering digital skills, online safety, digital ethics, and digital culture	To enhance awareness and responsible use of digital platforms
3	Social Entrepreneurship – idea generation, community problem mapping, and pitching	To encourage creativity and entrepreneurial thinking across cultures
4	Global Citizenship – tolerance, intercultural collaboration, and youth’s role in global society	To strengthen transnational identity and social responsibility

The digital literacy session was structured based on a comprehensive framework that includes operational ICT skills, digital safety, ethics, and culture. Such a model has been successfully used in youth empowerment programs to build awareness of responsible digital use in emerging societies (Setiadi et al., 2023).

Delivery methods and media included multimedia presentations (PowerPoint, interactive videos), group discussions based on case studies and simulations, hands-on practice in developing digital campaign prototypes (posters, short videos, and interactive presentations), and reflective journals where students documented cross-cultural learning insights.

Evaluation and Monitoring

To measure program effectiveness, several evaluation mechanisms were applied:

- a. Daily Reflection: students wrote summaries of insights and challenges experienced during activities.
- b. Final Assessment: mini-campaign group presentations, assessed through feedback from Indonesian facilitators and local Thai teachers.
- c. Follow-up: a satisfaction survey at the end of the program, designed to capture continuity of digital literacy and entrepreneurship activities within the local community.

This evaluation design is aligned with prior studies showing that digital literacy workshops developed through collaboration between universities and high schools significantly improved students' digital skills and interest in STEM careers (Bruckhaus et al., 2024).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework guiding this international community service programme integrates Positive Youth Development (PYD) and Cross-Cultural Empowerment, supported by Digital Literacy and Entrepreneurial Learning. The framework consists of four main components:

1. Input
 - a. Target Group: 70 middle school students (aged 13–16) from Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, Hat Yai, Thailand.
 - b. Resources: Indonesian lecturer and student facilitators, digital literacy modules, entrepreneurship training materials, simulation tools, and support from local teachers and community stakeholders.
2. Process
 - a. Leadership & PYD Development: activities focused on self-awareness, teamwork, and inclusive leadership values.
 - b. Digital Literacy Training: workshops on digital skills, online safety, ethics, and culture to encourage responsible digital citizenship.
 - c. Entrepreneurial Learning: experiential learning through idea generation, community problem mapping, role-play, and pitching exercises.
 - d. Cross-Cultural Collaboration: interactive discussions and cultural exchange sessions co-facilitated by Indonesian and Thai participants, fostering mutual understanding.

3. Output
 - a. Increased knowledge and awareness of youth leadership and PYD principles.
 - b. Enhanced digital literacy skills, including safe, ethical, and effective use of digital tools.
 - c. Improved creativity, problem-solving, and entrepreneurial thinking through social enterprise projects.
 - d. Strengthened intercultural communication and collaboration among students.
4. Outcome
 - a. Students demonstrate leadership qualities and positive youth development attributes (competence, confidence, connection, character, caring).
 - b. Increased application of digital literacy in schoolwork and community activities.
 - c. Emergence of entrepreneurial behaviour among students, with innovative ideas to address local community challenges.
 - d. Long-term empowerment of youth as responsible global citizens, strengthening cross-cultural ties and sustainability of community development.



Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of the international community service program at Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, Hat Yai, Thailand was closely aligned with the implementation method previously designed. The approach applied was an intervention based on Positive Youth Development (PYD), emphasizing the strengthening of competence, confidence, character, social connection, and caring the so-called Five Cs (Extension Publications, 2019). These elements served as the foundation for supporting youth development in the school community.

Implementation Stages in Relation to PYD Approach

The design of the activities combined:

- a. Workshops:
Integrating presentations, small group discussions, and simulation practices to stimulate both knowledge and practical skills.
- b. Cross-Cultural Approach:
Each session was co-facilitated by speakers from Indonesia and local Thai representatives, encouraging meaningful cultural interaction and mutual enrichment.

These methods proved effective in ensuring that the Five Cs of PYD were not only introduced conceptually but also experienced directly by the participants through interactive learning.

Measurement Results (Three-Box Method)

To evaluate the outcomes, the Three-Box Method was applied with three indicators:

- a. Knowledge (K):
Reflecting competence in digital literacy, entrepreneurship, and leadership concepts.
- b. Skills (S):
Representing confidence and character through communication, teamwork, and public speaking practices.
- c. Attitude (A):
Demonstrating connection and caring in terms of empathy, cross-cultural openness, and collaboration.

The results are summarized in Table 1.

Table 2. Three-Box Method Evaluation of Programme Outcomes

Scores (Total K+S+A)	Criteria
50.00 – 100.00	Low
100.01 – 150.00	Medium
150.01 – 200.00	High

Most participants achieved scores in the High category, especially in Attitude (connection and caring) and Skills (confidence and character). This indicates that the program not only improved cognitive aspects but also shaped positive behavioral outcomes in line with PYD principles.

Formula for Score Calculation

The total score of each participant was calculated using the following formula:

$$Y=K+S+A...(1)$$

Where:

Y = Total Score

K = Knowledge Score (Competence)

S = Skills Score (Confidence & Character)

A = Attitude Score (Connection & Caring)

The calculation showed that more than 70% of participants scored $Y \geq 150$, classified as High.

The findings clearly illustrate that the implementation method—comprising interactive workshops enriched by a cross-cultural facilitation structure—was highly effective in actualizing the Positive Youth Development (PYD) framework. Participants achieved notably high scores in the Attitude domain, highlighting that cultural exchange and co-facilitation between Indonesian and Thai facilitators successfully fostered a profound sense of *connection* and *caring*.

Meanwhile, improvements in Skills underscored the effectiveness of simulation exercises and small-group discussions in cultivating *confidence* and *characteristic resilience*, while advances in the Knowledge domain validated how structured presentations and tailored learning materials effectively enhanced *competence*.

Moreover, these outcomes align well with broader empirical evidence. For instance, a qualitative study in New Zealand emphasized the importance of culturally and contextually reframing the Five Cs – highlighting the inclusion of *belonging* and *positive identity* as essential elements of youth development (Mercier et al., 2025). A cross-sectional investigation involving youth from Peru and Spain found that higher levels of Competence, Confidence, Character, and Connection were significantly associated with lower depressive symptoms, confirming the protective psychological role of the Five Cs across different cultural contexts (Manrique-Millones et al., 2023). In Europe, a quasi-experimental study in Lithuania demonstrated that participants in a structured youth development program scored higher in Competence, Connection, and Caring compared to control groups, reinforcing the health-promoting and resilience-building potential of PYD-based interventions (Martin-Barrado & Gomez-Baya, 2024).

Additionally, global comparisons across six countries revealed distinct cultural patterns in the expression of the Five Cs among youth, emphasizing that designing culturally relevant interventions is crucial for effective youth development (Fernandes et al., 2021). Lastly, foundational definitions of the Five Cs Competence, Confidence, Character, Connection, and Caring continue to underpin PYD theory and practice in educational and community settings, providing a solid theoretical basis for program design.

In sum, the synergy between the PYD Five Cs and interactive, cross-cultural approaches created a holistic learning environment that not only enhanced cognitive and skill-based competencies but also nurtured psychological well-being and social empathy among participants substantially supporting their overall personal and social development.





Figure 2. PKM Team and Partner Documentation

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The implementation of the international service program at Sangkhom Islam Wittaya School, Hat Yai, Thailand has been successfully carried out in accordance with the planned methods. Using the Positive Youth Development (PYD) approach, the program strengthened the Five Cs competence, confidence, character, connection, and caring through workshops, cross-cultural exchanges, and interactive learning. The evaluation using the Three-Box Method showed that most participants achieved a high category score, especially in the aspects of attitude (connection and caring) and skills (confidence and character). This indicates that the service program not only improved knowledge but also effectively enhanced positive behavior, cross-cultural empathy, and personal development among the youth. Overall, the service results demonstrate that the chosen method of implementation interactive workshops and cross-cultural facilitation was effective in supporting holistic youth development in the school environment.

1. Sustainability of the Program. Continuous collaboration between Indonesian and Thai educators is recommended to maintain the sustainability of the PYD-based program, particularly by integrating cross-cultural exchanges into the school's extracurricular activities.
2. Integration into Curriculum. The elements of leadership, financial literacy, and digital skills introduced in the program should be embedded in school curricula to ensure long-term benefits.
3. Capacity Building for Teachers. Training sessions for teachers are recommended so they can apply the PYD approach independently, ensuring that the positive impacts extend beyond the duration of the service program.
4. Expansion to Other Schools. The success of this program suggests that it could be replicated in other schools in Southern Thailand and Indonesia, particularly in schools with multicultural environments, to promote cross-cultural understanding and youth empowerment.

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