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Our decision is: Revisions Required

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by Rahmad Ade Akbar

Implementing Project-Based Learning to Strengthen Students' Responsibility Character in an International Community Service Program at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi Project-Based Learning (PBL) sebagai strategi penguatan karakter tanggung jawab mahasiswa dalam kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat internasional di Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Pendekatan PBL digunakan untuk mendorong keterlibatan aktif mahasiswa melalui proyek kolaboratif yang berorientasi pada pemecahan masalah nyata di masyarakat. Metode pengabdian dilakukan melalui tahapan perencanaan, pelaksanaan, monitoring, dan refleksi, dengan fokus pada pengamatan perubahan perilaku mahasiswa terkait disiplin, komitmen tugas, kerja sama tim, dan akuntabilitas hasil. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami peningkatan kesadaran tanggung jawab, baik secara personal maupun sosial, yang tercermin dalam pengelolaan tugas, partisipasi aktif, serta kemampuan beradaptasi dalam konteks lintas budaya. Dengan demikian, PBL terbukti tidak hanya efektif dalam meningkatkan kompetensi akademik, tetapi juga berperan signifikan dalam membentuk karakter tanggung jawab mahasiswa dalam konteks pembelajaran global.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a strategy for strengthening students' responsibility character in an international community service program at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The PBL approach was applied to encourage active student engagement through collaborative projects focused on solving real community problems. The program was conducted through four stages: planning, implementation, monitoring, and reflection, with emphasis on observing behavioral changes related to discipline, task commitment, teamwork, and accountability. The results indicate that students demonstrated increased responsibility awareness, both personally and socially, as reflected in task management, active participation, and adaptability in intercultural contexts. Therefore, PBL is proven to be not only effective in enhancing academic competencies but also plays a significant role in developing students' responsibility character within global learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, higher education institutions have increasingly emphasized the

importance of character education as a core component of student development, alongside academic and professional competencies. One of the key character values required in the 21st century is responsibility, which includes students' ability to manage tasks, demonstrate accountability, collaborate effectively, and commit to collective goals. Responsibility is not merely a personal moral trait, but also a social competence that enables students to engage productively in real-world contexts, particularly in community-based and international learning environments. Therefore, universities are challenged to design learning strategies that not only enhance cognitive skills but also systematically strengthen students' character formation through authentic learning experiences.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely recognized as a pedagogical approach that promotes active learning, problem-solving, and student-centered engagement. PBL emphasizes learning through meaningful projects that require students to plan, execute, evaluate, and reflect on their actions, making it highly relevant for character development. Previous studies have shown that PBL significantly improves higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Lindra et al., 2025). Similarly, PBL has been proven effective in enhancing students' practical competencies and learning motivation, especially when integrated with interdisciplinary approaches such as STEAM-based learning (Fitriyah & Ramadani, 2021). These findings indicate that PBL provides a strong pedagogical foundation for developing both academic and soft skills in higher education.

Beyond classroom contexts, the integration of PBL into community engagement and service learning has gained increasing attention. Service learning-based programs allow students to apply academic knowledge in real social contexts, fostering social awareness and civic responsibility. Mona Novita et al. (2023) demonstrated that community–university partnerships grounded in service learning effectively improve students' social participation while contributing to local community development. This approach aligns with social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals acquire attitudes and behaviors through social interaction and experiential processes (Nuryana & Asmorojati, 2022). In this sense, PBL within community service activities offers a powerful platform for cultivating responsibility through direct engagement with societal issues.

However, most existing studies on PBL and service learning focus primarily on domestic or local contexts, with limited attention to international community service programs. Furthermore, many studies emphasize cognitive outcomes, technological acceptance, or institutional effectiveness rather than explicitly examining character outcomes such as responsibility. For instance, Cheung and Vogel (2013) highlighted user acceptance of collaborative technologies in e-learning environments, focusing on behavioral intention rather than character formation. Similarly, although PBL has been linked to ethical and moral education in various forms, the integration of responsibility character within structured international engagement remains underexplored. Even studies addressing moral or ethical dimensions, such as anti-corruption education, tend to concentrate on awareness and behavioral compliance rather than sustained character development (Nuryana & Asmorojati, 2022).

This gap indicates the need for empirical studies that explicitly analyze how PBL contributes to strengthening students' responsibility character within international community service settings. While normative and philosophical perspectives on responsibility exist, including ethical frameworks that emphasize moral accountability in social life (Amin, 2017), there is still a lack of applied pedagogical models that translate these values into observable student behaviors in cross-cultural learning environments. Most prior research treats PBL as a

tool for skill acquisition, not as a structured mechanism for character internalization, especially in international contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on implementing PBL as a character-based learning strategy within an international community service program at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Unlike previous studies that emphasize domestic learning environments or technological learning systems, this study positions international community engagement as a transformative space for responsibility character formation. The integration of PBL with real intercultural collaboration, social problem-solving, and reflective practices offers a new empirical contribution to the literature on character education, service learning, and international pedagogy.

Therefore, the purpose of this community service program is to analyze how the implementation of Project-Based Learning strengthens students' responsibility character through international engagement activities. Specifically, this study aims to explore the design and implementation of PBL in an international setting, examine changes in students' responsibility-related behaviors, and discuss the findings in relation to educational theory and previous international studies. By doing so, this study is expected to contribute not only to practical models of international community service but also to the broader discourse on character-based higher education in global learning environments.

METHOD

This community service program employed a Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach as the main instructional and implementation strategy to strengthen students' responsibility character through international engagement activities at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The program involved undergraduate students from Indonesia and Malaysia who participated in collaborative projects designed to address real community needs while fostering intercultural learning experiences.

The implementation process was structured into four main stages: planning, implementation, monitoring, and reflection. In the planning stage, the academic team identified relevant community issues in collaboration with local partners and designed project themes aligned with educational and social objectives. Students were grouped into interdisciplinary teams and assigned specific project tasks, such as needs analysis, project design, and outcome mapping. Each group was required to develop a project proposal that outlined objectives, roles, timelines, and expected outputs.

During the implementation stage, students carried out their projects through direct field activities, online coordination, and cross-cultural communication. Lecturers acted as facilitators, providing guidance, feedback, and supervision while encouraging student autonomy and accountability. Students were responsible for managing their schedules, distributing tasks among team members, and ensuring the completion of project outputs according to agreed timelines.

The monitoring stage focused on observing students' behavioral indicators related to responsibility, including discipline, commitment, teamwork, problem-solving, and accountability for project results. Data were collected through observation sheets, reflective journals, and documentation of project activities. Regular coordination meetings were conducted to evaluate progress and address emerging challenges.

Finally, the reflection stage involved group discussions and individual reflective reports to evaluate learning experiences, personal development, and project impact. Students were

encouraged to reflect on their roles, challenges faced, and lessons learned from intercultural collaboration. This reflective process served as a key mechanism for internalizing responsibility values and linking practical experiences with personal character development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
Design and Implementation of Project-Based Learning in International Community Service

The design of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in international community service is fundamentally grounded in the principle that learning should be contextual, meaningful, and oriented toward real-life social challenges. PBL is not merely a technical instructional model, but a holistic educational strategy that integrates cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning. In the context of character education, PBL provides a structured learning environment that enables students to internalize values through active participation, collaboration, and responsibility for authentic tasks. Character education itself is understood as a systematic effort to cultivate moral awareness, ethical behavior, and social responsibility through educational processes (Eka Setiawati et al., 2020; Alhamuddin et al., 2022).

In international community service programs, the design of PBL begins with the identification of social problems that are relevant to both academic objectives and community needs. This problem identification stage is crucial because it determines the level of student engagement and the authenticity of the learning experience. Students are encouraged to conduct needs assessments, interact with local stakeholders, and analyze contextual challenges before formulating project plans. Such practices align with the concept of experiential learning, where knowledge is constructed through direct interaction with social reality, rather than abstract theoretical instruction (Fitriyah & Ramadani, 2021). This approach also reflects global and multicultural education principles, which emphasize intercultural understanding, adaptability, and ethical awareness in diverse social settings (Bassar et al., 2021).

The implementation of PBL in international community service is typically organized through collaborative group work, where students assume shared responsibility for project outcomes. Each group is assigned specific roles and tasks, such as project coordinator, field researcher, documentation officer, and communication liaison. This division of roles fosters accountability and mutual dependence, as students must rely on one another to achieve collective goals. Collaborative learning environments supported by digital communication platforms further enhance interaction and coordination across cultural boundaries (Cheung & Vogel, 2013). Through this process, responsibility is not taught explicitly as a moral concept, but practiced continuously through task management, time discipline, and collective decision-making.

From a character education perspective, PBL serves as a medium for internalizing moral values through habituation and reflective practice. Responsibility emerges as a behavioral outcome of repeated engagement in meaningful tasks that require commitment and accountability. This aligns with studies emphasizing that character is most effectively developed through participatory and action-based learning rather than didactic instruction (Amelya et al., 2016; Drajat, 2020). In international community service settings, students are exposed to complex social realities that demand ethical judgment, empathy, and professional conduct, thereby strengthening their sense of moral responsibility toward others.

The Islamic perspective on character education also reinforces the relevance of PBL in shaping responsibility. Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes the integration of knowledge

(ilm), action (amal), and moral intention (niyyah) as the foundation of ethical behavior. Responsibility is understood not only as social accountability but also as moral commitment to fulfill obligations toward God, society, and oneself (Alhamuddin et al., 2022; Amin, 2017). In this sense, PBL becomes a practical manifestation of moral education, as students are required to demonstrate sincerity, discipline, and integrity in real community engagement. The integration of ethical values within project activities strengthens students' awareness that responsibility is both a personal virtue and a social obligation.

Furthermore, the international dimension of community service amplifies the pedagogical impact of PBL by introducing intercultural challenges that require adaptive learning. Students must negotiate cultural differences, communication styles, and social norms while maintaining professional and ethical behavior. This process enhances students' global competence and social sensitivity, which are essential components of responsible citizenship in a globalized world (Bassar et al., 2021). The multicultural environment also provides opportunities for reflective dialogue, where students evaluate their assumptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses toward cultural diversity.

Empirical studies indicate that PBL is effective in strengthening not only academic competencies but also behavioral attributes such as discipline, collaboration, and responsibility. Research on disciplinary character development in educational institutions demonstrates that structured learning environments combined with consistent supervision and reflective evaluation significantly improve students' sense of accountability (Aji, 2025). Similarly, studies on character education emphasize that responsibility is best developed through continuous engagement in meaningful activities that require moral commitment and social interaction (Devina et al., 2023; Eka Setiawati et al., 2020).

In practical implementation, monitoring and evaluation play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of PBL in international community service. Lecturers function as facilitators and mentors, providing guidance while allowing students to exercise autonomy in decision-making. Observation, reflective journals, and group discussions are used to assess behavioral indicators of responsibility, such as punctuality, task completion, teamwork, and ethical conduct. This reflective process enables students to connect practical experiences with moral values, thereby internalizing responsibility as part of their personal character (Drajat, 2020; Amelya et al., 2016).

The design and implementation of PBL in international community service represent a transformative educational strategy that integrates academic learning with character formation. By engaging students in real social projects, fostering collaborative responsibility, and embedding ethical reflection within learning processes, PBL creates a holistic learning environment that strengthens students' responsibility character. This approach not only prepares students for professional challenges but also contributes to the development of socially responsible and morally grounded global citizens.

Strengthening Students' Responsibility Character through PBL Activities

Strengthening students' responsibility character through Project-Based Learning (PBL) is grounded in the understanding that character is not merely transmitted through moral instruction, but constructed through continuous experience, reflection, and social interaction. Responsibility as a character value encompasses students' ability to fulfill obligations, demonstrate accountability, manage tasks, and act ethically within social environments. Character education scholars emphasize that responsibility emerges from consistent behavioral

practice supported by meaningful learning contexts (Eka Setiawati et al., 2020; Lickona & Levis, 2003). In this regard, PBL offers a pedagogical framework that transforms abstract moral values into concrete behavioral habits through authentic learning activities.

PBL places students at the center of the learning process by engaging them in complex tasks that require planning, collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making. These learning conditions inherently demand responsibility, as students must take ownership of project goals, manage time effectively, and ensure the quality of their contributions. Empirical studies indicate that PBL significantly enhances students' learning motivation, independence, and task commitment, all of which are core indicators of responsibility (Fitriyah & Ramadani, 2021; Lindra et al., 2025). Through continuous involvement in project cycles, students internalize responsibility not as external discipline, but as intrinsic moral awareness.

From a character education perspective, responsibility is shaped through repeated exposure to situations that require ethical judgment and social accountability. Research on disciplinary character development demonstrates that structured learning environments that emphasize role distribution, supervision, and reflective evaluation effectively cultivate students' sense of responsibility (Aji, 2025). In PBL-based activities, students are not passive recipients of knowledge, but active agents responsible for determining strategies, solving problems, and evaluating outcomes. This learning dynamic strengthens students' moral autonomy and accountability toward collective goals.

The Islamic educational perspective further reinforces the role of experiential learning in character formation. Islamic character education emphasizes the integration of moral values with daily practice, where responsibility is understood as a form of ethical commitment (amanah) toward God, society, and oneself (Alhamuddin et al., 2022; Amin, 2017). Responsibility is not limited to task completion, but extends to moral integrity, sincerity, and social empathy. In this framework, PBL serves as a medium for internalizing Islamic ethical values through real social engagement, where students learn to act responsibly not only for personal success, but also for communal benefit.

In international community service contexts, PBL provides an even more powerful platform for responsibility character development due to the presence of intercultural challenges. Students are required to adapt to different cultural norms, communication styles, and social expectations, which demand heightened levels of self-regulation and ethical sensitivity. Multicultural education scholars argue that exposure to cultural diversity strengthens students' social responsibility and global citizenship, as they learn to respect differences and collaborate across cultural boundaries (Bassar et al., 2021; Hakim & Darojat, 2023). Through PBL-based international engagement, responsibility becomes a lived experience shaped by cross-cultural interaction and social reflection.

Technological mediation also plays an important role in supporting responsibility within PBL environments. Collaborative digital platforms enable students to coordinate tasks, share resources, and monitor progress collectively. Research on technology acceptance in collaborative learning suggests that digital tools enhance students' participation, transparency, and accountability in group work (Cheung & Vogel, 2013). By documenting activities, submitting reports, and participating in virtual coordination, students develop a sense of professional responsibility toward project commitments and team expectations.

Moreover, responsibility character is strengthened through reflective practices embedded in PBL activities. Reflection allows students to evaluate their learning experiences, recognize personal weaknesses, and identify ethical implications of their actions. Studies on

moral and anti-corruption education highlight that reflection is essential for transforming behavioral compliance into moral awareness (Drajat, 2020; Amelya et al., 2016). In PBL contexts, reflective journals and group discussions enable students to articulate learning meanings, internalize responsibility values, and connect practical experiences with moral principles.

The role of educators in facilitating responsibility development is also crucial. Lecturers act as moral role models and learning facilitators who guide students through constructive feedback, ethical dialogue, and behavioral supervision. Research on religious and moral education demonstrates that educators' personal integrity and pedagogical strategies significantly influence students' character formation (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Kholifah et al., 2025). In PBL-based international programs, educators encourage students to exercise autonomy while maintaining ethical standards, thereby fostering balanced character development between independence and accountability.

Local wisdom and cultural values further enrich responsibility education within PBL. Studies on character education based on cultural traditions show that integrating local values enhances students' moral identity and social awareness (Devina et al., 2023; Kurniawati & Matang, 2023). When students engage with community traditions and cultural practices during international service projects, they gain deeper understanding of social responsibility rooted in cultural ethics. This learning experience strengthens students' emotional connection with social values and reinforces responsibility as a culturally meaningful character trait.

Service learning research also confirms that community engagement significantly improves students' social responsibility and civic awareness. Mona Novita et al. (2023) found that community–university partnership programs promote students' commitment to social development and ethical participation. Similarly, civic education studies emphasize that responsibility is a fundamental dimension of national and global citizenship, shaped through participatory learning experiences (Mumpuni et al., 2025; Nafasabilla et al., 2025). PBL-based international community service thus functions as a transformative space where students develop responsibility through direct involvement in social problem-solving.

Strengthening students' responsibility character through PBL activities reflects a holistic educational approach that integrates moral values with experiential learning. PBL creates structured opportunities for students to practice accountability, discipline, cooperation, and ethical decision-making in real social contexts. Through continuous engagement, reflection, and intercultural interaction, responsibility evolves from a theoretical concept into an internalized personal virtue. This confirms that PBL is not only an effective pedagogical strategy for academic achievement, but also a powerful instrument for sustainable character development in higher education.

Discussion with Educational Theory and Previous International Studies

The findings of this study can be theoretically interpreted through the lens of experiential learning and character education, which emphasize that meaningful learning occurs when students actively engage with real-life problems and reflect on their experiences. In this framework, responsibility is not treated as a static moral concept, but as a dynamic character trait that develops through social interaction, ethical decision-making, and sustained practice. Educational theory suggests that character formation is most effective when learning environments provide opportunities for autonomy, accountability, and moral reflection, rather than relying solely on normative instruction (Sari Dewi et al., 2020; Nurlaili, 2023). The

implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in international community service aligns strongly with this theoretical orientation, as it situates students in authentic social contexts that require responsible action and ethical engagement.

From the perspective of service learning theory, the results of this study are consistent with the principle that community engagement enhances students' social responsibility and civic awareness. Service learning integrates academic content with community service, allowing students to apply knowledge while simultaneously developing moral and social competencies. Mona Novita et al. (2023) demonstrated that community–university partnership programs effectively foster students' commitment to social development and ethical participation. Similarly, the present study shows that international community service activities supported by PBL create a transformative learning space where students develop responsibility through direct involvement in social problem-solving and intercultural collaboration.

In terms of character education theory, responsibility is considered a core moral value that underpins other character traits such as discipline, honesty, cooperation, and empathy. Character education scholars argue that responsibility emerges through structured educational experiences that encourage students to internalize moral values and translate them into daily behavior (Nurlaili, 2023; Sari Dewi et al., 2020). The present findings confirm that PBL facilitates this internalization process by placing students in roles that require consistent accountability, such as managing project timelines, coordinating team tasks, and engaging with community partners. This learning environment supports the development of moral agency, where students perceive themselves as responsible actors within a broader social system.

The international dimension of the program also resonates with multicultural education theory, which emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness, social sensitivity, and ethical respect for diversity. Multicultural education literature suggests that exposure to diverse social environments strengthens students' moral reasoning and social responsibility, as they learn to negotiate cultural differences and develop inclusive attitudes (S. Candra et al., 2021). In line with this perspective, the present study indicates that international community service enhances students' responsibility by requiring them to adapt to different cultural norms, communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, and demonstrate ethical conduct in unfamiliar contexts.

The findings are also supported by research on moral and civic education, which highlights that responsibility is closely linked to students' sense of citizenship and social identity. Studies on civic education emphasize that responsibility is not only an individual virtue but also a collective commitment to contribute to social welfare and national development (Mumpuni et al., 2025). Similarly, Nafasabilla et al. (2025) found that preventive moral education programs strengthen students' awareness of social obligations and ethical behavior from an early age. In the context of higher education, PBL-based international community service functions as a form of advanced civic education, where students learn to enact responsibility within global social contexts.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, responsibility is also shaped through reflective dialogue and ethical inquiry. Inquiry-based learning theories argue that students develop deeper moral understanding when they are encouraged to question assumptions, analyze social problems, and engage in critical reflection (Syafruddin et al., 2025). The present study reflects this theoretical stance, as reflective practices embedded in PBL activities—such as group discussions and reflective reports—enable students to connect personal experiences with broader ethical principles. Through reflection, responsibility evolves from behavioral compliance into moral consciousness.

The integration of religious and ethical education further enriches the theoretical interpretation of the findings. Religious character education emphasizes that responsibility is rooted in spiritual awareness and moral intention, where individuals perceive ethical behavior as a form of devotion and social obligation (Nurlaili, 2023; Sari Dewi et al., 2020). Islamic educational theory, in particular, conceptualizes responsibility as amanah, which involves moral accountability toward God, society, and oneself. This perspective supports the findings of this study, as students demonstrated responsible behavior not only for academic achievement but also for moral integrity and communal benefit.

Previous international studies on project-based and inquiry-based learning also corroborate the effectiveness of experiential approaches in strengthening character values. Nuryana and Asmorojati (2022) found that project-based anti-corruption education significantly improved students' moral awareness and ethical behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings suggest that moral values are more effectively internalized when students are actively involved in problem-solving activities rather than passive learning. Similarly, Purwanto et al. (2021) demonstrated that contextual learning environments enhance students' social sensitivity and ethical reasoning, particularly in relation to population and environmental issues.

Digital pedagogy and institutional strategies also play a critical role in supporting responsibility development. Research on educational institutions in the digital era indicates that responsible character formation requires systematic institutional support, including curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, and continuous evaluation (Nurhabibi et al., 2025). The present study aligns with this view, as the success of PBL in strengthening responsibility was facilitated by structured program design, lecturer supervision, and reflective assessment mechanisms.

Furthermore, studies on private tutoring and personalized learning highlight the importance of close interaction between educators and students in character development. Raharjo et al. (2025) found that personalized educational guidance enhances students' moral understanding and learning motivation. In the present study, lecturers functioned as facilitators and mentors who provided moral guidance while encouraging student autonomy. This pedagogical relationship supports the development of responsibility through balanced guidance and independence.

The findings of this study confirm and extend existing educational theories and international research on character education, service learning, and experiential pedagogy. The integration of PBL within international community service offers a comprehensive learning model that unites academic learning, moral reflection, and social engagement. Theoretically, this approach is consistent with experiential learning theory, character education principles, multicultural education, and religious moral frameworks. Empirically, it is supported by previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of project-based, inquiry-based, and service learning approaches in strengthening students' responsibility and ethical awareness.

Therefore, this study contributes to the global discourse on character education by providing empirical evidence that responsibility can be systematically strengthened through structured PBL activities in international contexts. The combination of experiential learning, reflective practice, intercultural interaction, and ethical guidance creates a holistic educational environment that prepares students not only as competent professionals but also as morally responsible global citizens.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in

international community service programs is an effective pedagogical strategy for strengthening students' responsibility character in higher education. Through structured project activities, collaborative learning, and reflective practices, students develop a strong sense of accountability, discipline, ethical awareness, and social commitment. The international context further enriches this process by exposing students to multicultural environments that demand adaptive behavior, intercultural communication, and moral sensitivity. Overall, PBL not only enhances students' academic and professional competencies, but also functions as a transformative learning model that integrates experiential learning with character education, preparing students to become responsible, reflective, and socially engaged global citizens.

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Project-Based Learning for Strengthening Students' Responsibility in International Community Service

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ABSTRAK

Artikel ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis implementasi Project-Based Learning (PBL) sebagai strategi penguatan karakter tanggung jawab mahasiswa dalam kegiatan pengabdian masyarakat internasional di Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Pendekatan PBL digunakan untuk mendorong keterlibatan aktif mahasiswa melalui proyek kolaboratif yang berorientasi pada pemecahan masalah nyata di masyarakat. Metode pengabdian dilakukan melalui tahapan perencanaan, pelaksanaan, monitoring, dan refleksi, dengan fokus pada pengamatan perubahan perilaku mahasiswa terkait disiplin, komitmen tugas, kerja sama tim, dan akuntabilitas hasil. Hasil kegiatan menunjukkan bahwa mahasiswa mengalami peningkatan kesadaran tanggung jawab, baik secara personal maupun sosial, yang tercermin dalam pengelolaan tugas, partisipasi aktif, serta kemampuan beradaptasi dalam konteks lintas budaya. Dengan demikian, PBL terbukti tidak hanya efektif dalam meningkatkan kompetensi akademik, tetapi juga berperan signifikan dalam membentuk karakter tanggung jawab mahasiswa dalam konteks pembelajaran global.

ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) as a strategy for strengthening students' responsibility character in an international community service program at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The PBL approach was applied to encourage active student engagement through collaborative projects focused on solving real community problems. The program was conducted through four stages: planning, implementation, monitoring, and reflection, with emphasis on observing behavioral changes related to discipline, task commitment, teamwork, and accountability. The results indicate that students demonstrated increased responsibility awareness, both personally and socially, as reflected in task management, active participation, and adaptability in intercultural contexts. Therefore, PBL is proven to be not only effective in enhancing academic competencies but also plays a significant role in developing students' responsibility character within global learning environments.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, higher education institutions have increasingly emphasized the importance of character education as a core component of student development, alongside academic and professional competencies. One of the key character values required in the 21st

century is responsibility, which includes students' ability to manage tasks, demonstrate accountability, collaborate effectively, and commit to collective goals. Responsibility is not merely a personal moral trait, but also a social competence that enables students to engage productively in real-world contexts, particularly in community-based and international learning environments. Therefore, universities are challenged to design learning strategies that not only enhance cognitive skills but also systematically strengthen students' character formation through authentic learning experiences.

Project-Based Learning (PBL) has been widely recognized as a pedagogical approach that promotes active learning, problem-solving, and student-centered engagement. PBL emphasizes learning through meaningful projects that require students to plan, execute, evaluate, and reflect on their actions, making it highly relevant for character development. Previous studies have shown that PBL significantly improves higher-order thinking skills such as critical thinking, creativity, communication, and collaboration (Lindra et al., 2025). Similarly, PBL has been proven effective in enhancing students' practical competencies and learning motivation, especially when integrated with interdisciplinary approaches such as STEAM-based learning (Fitriyah & Ramadani, 2021). These findings indicate that PBL provides a strong pedagogical foundation for developing both academic and soft skills in higher education.

Beyond classroom contexts, the integration of PBL into community engagement and service learning has gained increasing attention. Service learning-based programs allow students to apply academic knowledge in real social contexts, fostering social awareness and civic responsibility. Mona Novita et al. (2023) demonstrated that community–university partnerships grounded in service learning effectively improve students' social participation while contributing to local community development. This approach aligns with social learning theory, which emphasizes that individuals acquire attitudes and behaviors through social interaction and experiential processes (Nuryana & Asmorojati, 2022). In this sense, PBL within community service activities offers a powerful platform for cultivating responsibility through direct engagement with societal issues.

However, most existing studies on PBL and service learning focus primarily on domestic or local contexts, with limited attention to international community service programs. Furthermore, many studies emphasize cognitive outcomes, technological acceptance, or institutional effectiveness rather than explicitly examining character outcomes such as responsibility. For instance, Cheung and Vogel (2013) highlighted user acceptance of collaborative technologies in e-learning environments, focusing on behavioral intention rather than character formation. Similarly, although PBL has been linked to ethical and moral education in various forms, the integration of responsibility character within structured international engagement remains underexplored. Even studies addressing moral or ethical dimensions, such as anti-corruption education, tend to concentrate on awareness and behavioral compliance rather than sustained character development (Nuryana & Asmorojati, 2022).

This gap indicates the need for empirical studies that explicitly analyze how PBL contributes to strengthening students' responsibility character within international community service settings. While normative and philosophical perspectives on responsibility exist, including ethical frameworks that emphasize moral accountability in social life (Amin, 2017), there is still a lack of applied pedagogical models that translate these values into observable student behaviors in cross-cultural learning environments. Most prior research treats PBL as a tool for skill acquisition, not as a structured mechanism for character internalization, especially in international contexts.

The novelty of this study lies in its focus on implementing PBL as a character-based learning strategy within an international community service program at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Unlike previous studies that emphasize domestic learning environments or technological learning systems, this study positions international community engagement as a transformative space for responsibility character formation. The integration of PBL with real intercultural collaboration, social problem-solving, and reflective practices offers a new empirical contribution to the literature on character education, service learning, and international pedagogy.

Therefore, the purpose of this community service program is to analyze how the implementation of Project-Based Learning strengthens students' responsibility character through international engagement activities. Specifically, this study aims to explore the design and implementation of PBL in an international setting, examine changes in students' responsibility-related behaviors, and discuss the findings in relation to educational theory and previous international studies. By doing so, this study is expected to contribute not only to practical models of international community service but also to the broader discourse on character-based higher education in global learning environments.

METHOD

This community service program employed a Project-Based Learning (PBL) approach as the main instructional and implementation strategy to strengthen students' responsibility character through international engagement activities at Universiti Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The program involved undergraduate students from Indonesia and Malaysia who participated in collaborative projects designed to address real community needs while fostering intercultural learning experiences.

The implementation process was structured into four main stages: planning, implementation, monitoring, and reflection. In the planning stage, the academic team identified relevant community issues in collaboration with local partners and designed project themes aligned with educational and social objectives. Students were grouped into interdisciplinary teams and assigned specific project tasks, such as needs analysis, project design, and outcome mapping. Each group was required to develop a project proposal that outlined objectives, roles, timelines, and expected outputs.

During the implementation stage, students carried out their projects through direct field activities, online coordination, and cross-cultural communication. Lecturers acted as facilitators, providing guidance, feedback, and supervision while encouraging student autonomy and accountability. Students were responsible for managing their schedules, distributing tasks among team members, and ensuring the completion of project outputs according to agreed timelines.

The monitoring stage focused on observing students' behavioral indicators related to responsibility, including discipline, commitment, teamwork, problem-solving, and accountability for project results. Data were collected through observation sheets, reflective journals, and documentation of project activities. Regular coordination meetings were conducted to evaluate progress and address emerging challenges.

Finally, the reflection stage involved group discussions and individual reflective reports to evaluate learning experiences, personal development, and project impact. Students were encouraged to reflect on their roles, challenges faced, and lessons learned from intercultural

collaboration. This reflective process served as a key mechanism for internalizing responsibility values and linking practical experiences with personal character development.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Design and Implementation of Project-Based Learning in International Community Service

The design of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in international community service is fundamentally grounded in the principle that learning should be contextual, meaningful, and oriented toward real-life social challenges. PBL is not merely a technical instructional model, but a holistic educational strategy that integrates cognitive, affective, and social dimensions of learning. In the context of character education, PBL provides a structured learning environment that enables students to internalize values through active participation, collaboration, and responsibility for authentic tasks. Character education itself is understood as a systematic effort to cultivate moral awareness, ethical behavior, and social responsibility through educational processes (Eka Setiawati et al., 2020); (Alhamuddin et al., 2022).

In international community service programs, the design of PBL begins with the identification of social problems that are relevant to both academic objectives and community needs. This problem identification stage is crucial because it determines the level of student engagement and the authenticity of the learning experience. Students are encouraged to conduct needs assessments, interact with local stakeholders, and analyze contextual challenges before formulating project plans. Such practices align with the concept of experiential learning, where knowledge is constructed through direct interaction with social reality, rather than abstract theoretical instruction (Fitriyah & Ramadani, 2021). This approach also reflects global and multicultural education principles, which emphasize intercultural understanding, adaptability, and ethical awareness in diverse social settings (Bassar et al., 2021).

The implementation of PBL in international community service is typically organized through collaborative group work, where students assume shared responsibility for project outcomes. Each group is assigned specific roles and tasks, such as project coordinator, field researcher, documentation officer, and communication liaison. This division of roles fosters accountability and mutual dependence, as students must rely on one another to achieve collective goals. Collaborative learning environments supported by digital communication platforms further enhance interaction and coordination across cultural boundaries (Cheung & Vogel, 2013). Through this process, responsibility is not taught explicitly as a moral concept, but practiced continuously through task management, time discipline, and collective decision-making.

From a character education perspective, PBL serves as a medium for internalizing moral values through habituation and reflective practice. Responsibility emerges as a behavioral outcome of repeated engagement in meaningful tasks that require commitment and accountability. This aligns with studies emphasizing that character is most effectively developed through participatory and action-based learning rather than didactic instruction (Amelya et al., 2016); (Drajat, 2020). In international community service settings, students are exposed to complex social realities that demand ethical judgment, empathy, and professional conduct, thereby strengthening their sense of moral responsibility toward others.

The Islamic perspective on character education also reinforces the relevance of PBL in shaping responsibility. Islamic educational philosophy emphasizes the integration of knowledge (ilm), action (amal), and moral intention (niyyah) as the foundation of ethical behavior.

Responsibility is understood not only as social accountability but also as moral commitment to fulfill obligations toward God, society, and oneself (Alhamuddin et al., 2022); (Amin, 2017). In this sense, PBL becomes a practical manifestation of moral education, as students are required to demonstrate sincerity, discipline, and integrity in real community engagement. The integration of ethical values within project activities strengthens students' awareness that responsibility is both a personal virtue and a social obligation.

Furthermore, the international dimension of community service amplifies the pedagogical impact of PBL by introducing intercultural challenges that require adaptive learning. Students must negotiate cultural differences, communication styles, and social norms while maintaining professional and ethical behavior. This process enhances students' global competence and social sensitivity, which are essential components of responsible citizenship in a globalized world (Bassar et al., 2021). The multicultural environment also provides opportunities for reflective dialogue, where students evaluate their assumptions, attitudes, and behavioral responses toward cultural diversity.

Empirical studies indicate that PBL is effective in strengthening not only academic competencies but also behavioral attributes such as discipline, collaboration, and responsibility. Research on disciplinary character development in educational institutions demonstrates that structured learning environments combined with consistent supervision and reflective evaluation significantly improve students' sense of accountability (Aji, 2025). Similarly, studies on character education emphasize that responsibility is best developed through continuous engagement in meaningful activities that require moral commitment and social interaction (Devina et al., 2023; Eka Setiawati et al., 2020).

In practical implementation, monitoring and evaluation play a crucial role in ensuring the effectiveness of PBL in international community service. Lecturers function as facilitators and mentors, providing guidance while allowing students to exercise autonomy in decision-making. Observation, reflective journals, and group discussions are used to assess behavioral indicators of responsibility, such as punctuality, task completion, teamwork, and ethical conduct. This reflective process enables students to connect practical experiences with moral values, thereby internalizing responsibility as part of their personal character (Drajat, 2020; Amelya et al., 2016).

The design and implementation of PBL in international community service represent a transformative educational strategy that integrates academic learning with character formation. By engaging students in real social projects, fostering collaborative responsibility, and embedding ethical reflection within learning processes, PBL creates a holistic learning environment that strengthens students' responsibility character. This approach not only prepares students for professional challenges but also contributes to the development of socially responsible and morally grounded global citizens.

Strengthening Students' Responsibility Character through PBL Activities

Strengthening students' responsibility character through Project-Based Learning (PBL) is grounded in the understanding that character is not merely transmitted through moral instruction, but constructed through continuous experience, reflection, and social interaction. Responsibility as a character value encompasses students' ability to fulfill obligations, demonstrate accountability, manage tasks, and act ethically within social environments. Character education scholars emphasize that responsibility emerges from consistent behavioral practice supported by meaningful learning contexts (Eka Setiawati et al., 2020; Lickona & Levis,

2003). In this regard, PBL offers a pedagogical framework that transforms abstract moral values into concrete behavioral habits through authentic learning activities.

PBL places students at the center of the learning process by engaging them in complex tasks that require planning, collaboration, problem-solving, and decision-making. These learning conditions inherently demand responsibility, as students must take ownership of project goals, manage time effectively, and ensure the quality of their contributions. Empirical studies indicate that PBL significantly enhances students' learning motivation, independence, and task commitment, all of which are core indicators of responsibility (Fitriyah & Ramadani, 2021; Lindra et al., 2025). Through continuous involvement in project cycles, students internalize responsibility not as external discipline, but as intrinsic moral awareness.

From a character education perspective, responsibility is shaped through repeated exposure to situations that require ethical judgment and social accountability. Research on disciplinary character development demonstrates that structured learning environments that emphasize role distribution, supervision, and reflective evaluation effectively cultivate students' sense of responsibility (Aji, 2025). In PBL-based activities, students are not passive recipients of knowledge, but active agents responsible for determining strategies, solving problems, and evaluating outcomes. This learning dynamic strengthens students' moral autonomy and accountability toward collective goals.

The Islamic educational perspective further reinforces the role of experiential learning in character formation. Islamic character education emphasizes the integration of moral values with daily practice, where responsibility is understood as a form of ethical commitment (amanah) toward God, society, and oneself (Alhamuddin et al., 2022; Amin, 2017). Responsibility is not limited to task completion, but extends to moral integrity, sincerity, and social empathy. In this framework, PBL serves as a medium for internalizing Islamic ethical values through real social engagement, where students learn to act responsibly not only for personal success, but also for communal benefit.

In international community service contexts, PBL provides an even more powerful platform for responsibility character development due to the presence of intercultural challenges. Students are required to adapt to different cultural norms, communication styles, and social expectations, which demand heightened levels of self-regulation and ethical sensitivity. Multicultural education scholars argue that exposure to cultural diversity strengthens students' social responsibility and global citizenship, as they learn to respect differences and collaborate across cultural boundaries (Bassar et al., 2021; Hakim & Darojat, 2023). Through PBL-based international engagement, responsibility becomes a lived experience shaped by cross-cultural interaction and social reflection.

Technological mediation also plays an important role in supporting responsibility within PBL environments. Collaborative digital platforms enable students to coordinate tasks, share resources, and monitor progress collectively. Research on technology acceptance in collaborative learning suggests that digital tools enhance students' participation, transparency, and accountability in group work (Cheung & Vogel, 2013). By documenting activities, submitting reports, and participating in virtual coordination, students develop a sense of professional responsibility toward project commitments and team expectations.

Moreover, responsibility character is strengthened through reflective practices embedded in PBL activities. Reflection allows students to evaluate their learning experiences, recognize personal weaknesses, and identify ethical implications of their actions. Studies on moral and anti-corruption education highlight that reflection is essential for transforming

behavioral compliance into moral awareness (Drajat, 2020; Amelya et al., 2016). In PBL contexts, reflective journals and group discussions enable students to articulate learning meanings, internalize responsibility values, and connect practical experiences with moral principles.

The role of educators in facilitating responsibility development is also crucial. Lecturers act as moral role models and learning facilitators who guide students through constructive feedback, ethical dialogue, and behavioral supervision. Research on religious and moral education demonstrates that educators' personal integrity and pedagogical strategies significantly influence students' character formation (Fitriyah et al., 2024; Kholifah et al., 2025). In PBL-based international programs, educators encourage students to exercise autonomy while maintaining ethical standards, thereby fostering balanced character development between independence and accountability.

Local wisdom and cultural values further enrich responsibility education within PBL. Studies on character education based on cultural traditions show that integrating local values enhances students' moral identity and social awareness (Devina et al., 2023; Kurniawati & Matang, 2023). When students engage with community traditions and cultural practices during international service projects, they gain deeper understanding of social responsibility rooted in cultural ethics. This learning experience strengthens students' emotional connection with social values and reinforces responsibility as a culturally meaningful character trait.

Service learning research also confirms that community engagement significantly improves students' social responsibility and civic awareness. Mona Novita et al. (2023) found that community–university partnership programs promote students' commitment to social development and ethical participation. Similarly, civic education studies emphasize that responsibility is a fundamental dimension of national and global citizenship, shaped through participatory learning experiences (Mumpuni et al., 2025; Nafasabilla et al., 2025). PBL-based international community service thus functions as a transformative space where students develop responsibility through direct involvement in social problem-solving.

Strengthening students' responsibility character through PBL activities reflects a holistic educational approach that integrates moral values with experiential learning. PBL creates structured opportunities for students to practice accountability, discipline, cooperation, and ethical decision-making in real social contexts. Through continuous engagement, reflection, and intercultural interaction, responsibility evolves from a theoretical concept into an internalized personal virtue. This confirms that PBL is not only an effective pedagogical strategy for academic achievement, but also a powerful instrument for sustainable character development in higher education.

Discussion with Educational Theory and Previous International Studies

The findings of this study can be theoretically interpreted through the lens of experiential learning and character education, which emphasize that meaningful learning occurs when students actively engage with real-life problems and reflect on their experiences. In this framework, responsibility is not treated as a static moral concept, but as a dynamic character trait that develops through social interaction, ethical decision-making, and sustained practice. Educational theory suggests that character formation is most effective when learning environments provide opportunities for autonomy, accountability, and moral reflection, rather than relying solely on normative instruction (Sari Dewi et al., 2020; Nurlaili, 2023). The implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in international community service aligns

strongly with this theoretical orientation, as it situates students in authentic social contexts that require responsible action and ethical engagement.

From the perspective of service learning theory, the results of this study are consistent with the principle that community engagement enhances students' social responsibility and civic awareness. Service learning integrates academic content with community service, allowing students to apply knowledge while simultaneously developing moral and social competencies. Mona Novita et al. (2023) demonstrated that community–university partnership programs effectively foster students' commitment to social development and ethical participation. Similarly, the present study shows that international community service activities supported by PBL create a transformative learning space where students develop responsibility through direct involvement in social problem-solving and intercultural collaboration.

In terms of character education theory, responsibility is considered a core moral value that underpins other character traits such as discipline, honesty, cooperation, and empathy. Character education scholars argue that responsibility emerges through structured educational experiences that encourage students to internalize moral values and translate them into daily behavior (Nurlaili, 2023; Sari Dewi et al., 2020). The present findings confirm that PBL facilitates this internalization process by placing students in roles that require consistent accountability, such as managing project timelines, coordinating team tasks, and engaging with community partners. This learning environment supports the development of moral agency, where students perceive themselves as responsible actors within a broader social system.

The international dimension of the program also resonates with multicultural education theory, which emphasizes the importance of cultural awareness, social sensitivity, and ethical respect for diversity. Multicultural education literature suggests that exposure to diverse social environments strengthens students' moral reasoning and social responsibility, as they learn to negotiate cultural differences and develop inclusive attitudes (S. Candra et al., 2021). In line with this perspective, the present study indicates that international community service enhances students' responsibility by requiring them to adapt to different cultural norms, communicate effectively across cultural boundaries, and demonstrate ethical conduct in unfamiliar contexts.

The findings are also supported by research on moral and civic education, which highlights that responsibility is closely linked to students' sense of citizenship and social identity. Studies on civic education emphasize that responsibility is not only an individual virtue but also a collective commitment to contribute to social welfare and national development (Mumpuni et al., 2025). Similarly, Nafasabilla et al. (2025) found that preventive moral education programs strengthen students' awareness of social obligations and ethical behavior from an early age. In the context of higher education, PBL-based international community service functions as a form of advanced civic education, where students learn to enact responsibility within global social contexts.

From a critical pedagogical perspective, responsibility is also shaped through reflective dialogue and ethical inquiry. Inquiry-based learning theories argue that students develop deeper moral understanding when they are encouraged to question assumptions, analyze social problems, and engage in critical reflection (Syafruddin et al., 2025). The present study reflects this theoretical stance, as reflective practices embedded in PBL activities—such as group discussions and reflective reports—enable students to connect personal experiences with broader ethical principles. Through reflection, responsibility evolves from behavioral compliance into moral consciousness.

The integration of religious and ethical education further enriches the theoretical interpretation of the findings. Religious character education emphasizes that responsibility is rooted in spiritual awareness and moral intention, where individuals perceive ethical behavior as a form of devotion and social obligation (Nurlaili, 2023; Sari Dewi et al., 2020). Islamic educational theory, in particular, conceptualizes responsibility as amanah, which involves moral accountability toward God, society, and oneself. This perspective supports the findings of this study, as students demonstrated responsible behavior not only for academic achievement but also for moral integrity and communal benefit.

Previous international studies on project-based and inquiry-based learning also corroborate the effectiveness of experiential approaches in strengthening character values. Nuryana and Asmorojati (2022) found that project-based anti-corruption education significantly improved students' moral awareness and ethical behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their findings suggest that moral values are more effectively internalized when students are actively involved in problem-solving activities rather than passive learning. Similarly, Purwanto et al. (2021) demonstrated that contextual learning environments enhance students' social sensitivity and ethical reasoning, particularly in relation to population and environmental issues.

Digital pedagogy and institutional strategies also play a critical role in supporting responsibility development. Research on educational institutions in the digital era indicates that responsible character formation requires systematic institutional support, including curriculum design, pedagogical innovation, and continuous evaluation (Nurhabibi et al., 2025). The present study aligns with this view, as the success of PBL in strengthening responsibility was facilitated by structured program design, lecturer supervision, and reflective assessment mechanisms.

Furthermore, studies on private tutoring and personalized learning highlight the importance of close interaction between educators and students in character development. Raharjo et al. (2025) found that personalized educational guidance enhances students' moral understanding and learning motivation. In the present study, lecturers functioned as facilitators and mentors who provided moral guidance while encouraging student autonomy. This pedagogical relationship supports the development of responsibility through balanced guidance and independence.

The findings of this study confirm and extend existing educational theories and international research on character education, service learning, and experiential pedagogy. The integration of PBL within international community service offers a comprehensive learning model that unites academic learning, moral reflection, and social engagement. Theoretically, this approach is consistent with experiential learning theory, character education principles, multicultural education, and religious moral frameworks. Empirically, it is supported by previous studies demonstrating the effectiveness of project-based, inquiry-based, and service learning approaches in strengthening students' responsibility and ethical awareness.

Therefore, this study contributes to the global discourse on character education by providing empirical evidence that responsibility can be systematically strengthened through structured PBL activities in international contexts. The combination of experiential learning, reflective practice, intercultural interaction, and ethical guidance creates a holistic educational environment that prepares students not only as competent professionals but also as morally responsible global citizens.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the implementation of Project-Based Learning (PBL) in

international community service programs is an effective pedagogical strategy for strengthening students' responsibility character in higher education. Through structured project activities, collaborative learning, and reflective practices, students develop a strong sense of accountability, discipline, ethical awareness, and social commitment. The international context further enriches this process by exposing students to multicultural environments that demand adaptive behavior, intercultural communication, and moral sensitivity. Overall, PBL not only enhances students' academic and professional competencies, but also functions as a transformative learning model that integrates experiential learning with character education, preparing students to become responsible, reflective, and socially engaged global citizens.

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