



Strengthening Solidarity to Enhance the Role of New University Students in Community Engagement

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the importance of the role of new university students in community engagement and how solidarity can be strengthened to support their social character development. New students often face difficulties in adjusting to the university environment, which can lead to social alienation and a lack of understanding of their roles as agents of change. Through a designed community service program, known as "Malam Keakraban" (Makrab), new students are invited to participate in activities that emphasize social interaction and value reflection. This program involves thematic discussions, collaborative games, and participatory learning aimed at building social awareness and solidarity among students. The results of this activity indicate an increase in active participation, initiatives to engage in social activities, and positive changes in communication patterns among students. Thus, this article emphasizes that strengthening solidarity among new students is a strategic step in shaping their character and enhancing their contributions to society.

Keywords: solidarity, new students, community engagement, character development, community service.

INTRODUCTION

University students are social entities who hold a strategic position in the life of society. They do not only serve as academic individuals but also represent a vital component in the process of social transformation, national development, and the dissemination of universal human values. This role should ideally begin to take shape from the very moment students set foot on a university campus. However, in reality, many new students are often unable to fully articulate their social position within the community. This condition is further exacerbated by the lack of internal solidarity among new students, leading to social alienation, academic individualism, and limited empowerment within their communities (Handayani, 1980).

This phenomenon does not occur in isolation. In many cases, new students experience a confusing transitional phase from high school to university life. The shift in social environment, increased academic demands, and the absence of strong social networks often hinder students from building their social identity as members of both the academic community and society at large. As a result, awareness of important roles such as agents of change, social control, iron stock, and moral force remains mere normative slogans, without concrete manifestation in their daily academic lives (Shobirin, 2015).

Several community service programs have previously attempted to address these issues. For instance, the character development program through

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basic student leadership training conducted by Universitas Gadjah Mada emphasized the importance of integrating academic competence with social engagement. This program successfully increased students' social awareness and encouraged their involvement in community-based activities (Nofrima, 2013). The approach used was participatory, incorporating interactive dialogues, case studies, and guided social reflection by mentors.

However, most similar programs remain segmented and do not specifically target new students—who are, in fact, in the most critical phase of social character formation. Additionally, the methods employed are often dominated by one-way communication (lectures) or rely heavily on digital technology, which is less effective in fostering emotional bonds and direct interpersonal relationships. These activities have yet to reach the core essence of solidarity-building, which should emphasize the process of forming collective awareness through real interaction and shared social experiences (Cahya, 2009).

At the same time, there is a lack of appropriate technological or innovative methods developed to bridge the gap in the social roles of new students. Research by Hanif (2010) suggests that the use of informal spaces, such as structured non-formal student activities, can serve as effective media for instilling social values such as tolerance, empathy, and collective responsibility. This highlights the urgency of developing activity models that integrate educational, participatory, and communal values into one comprehensive program involving students, lecturers, and student organizations.

One such activity with great potential is the "Malam Keakraban" (Makrab), traditionally known as a social orientation program for new students. When managed systematically and aligned with the core values of the Tri Dharma Perguruan Tinggi (Three Pillars of Higher Education), Makrab can be transformed into a powerful medium for social character development. Rather than serving merely as an introductory gathering, it can be designed as a social education forum addressing strategic themes such as solidarity, leadership, social contribution, and the formation of student vision as active and socially-aware citizens (Fadli & Rifa'i, 2013).

A similar pattern can be observed among new students at Dehasen University of Bengkulu, where there is a high dependence on individual academic activities and weak internal social networks. This has led to symptoms of exclusivism, communication conflicts, and a decline in motivation to participate in student activities. Therefore, strengthening solidarity at the beginning of the academic journey is a strategic step to cultivate a collaborative culture and reinforce internal social networks among students from diverse backgrounds.

Furthermore, initial observations conducted by the Public Administration Student Association (HIMAPLIK) revealed that many new students lack a clear understanding of how to practically express their social roles. They require a developmental platform that is not only theoretical but also grounded in real-life experiences that stimulate social awareness. Such initiatives can serve as a safe and educational transition space for students to form their social identity.

In this context, a community service program titled "Strengthening Solidarity to Enhance the Role of New Students in Society" was designed. This program aims to create an educational space for social interaction and actively build solidarity among new students. Through face-to-face meetings, interactive discussions, value reflections, and the direct involvement of lecturers and HIMAPLIK members as facilitators, the program seeks to instill critical awareness of students' social roles while strengthening an inclusive and sustainable solidarity network.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The social role of university students can be analyzed through several interconnected theoretical perspectives that emphasize the importance of solidarity, identity formation, and social engagement in higher education settings.

First, social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979) explains how individuals define themselves based on group membership. New students, as part of a transitioning phase from adolescence to adulthood, are in the process of forming their identity within the academic and social environment of the university. Strong social identity leads to increased group cohesion and participation in collective activities. When students feel a sense of belonging, they are more likely to adopt and act upon their roles as agents of change and contributors to society.

Second, the concept of student development theory, particularly Chickering's Seven Vectors (Chickering & Reisser, 1993), highlights how college students develop competence, manage emotions, and establish identity through engagement and interpersonal relationships. Strengthening solidarity among new students supports their psychosocial development, enabling them to become more confident in their academic and social roles.

Third, the theory of participatory learning (Freire, 1970) underlines the significance of dialogue, critical reflection, and shared experiences in empowering learners to become active participants in social transformation. Applying this approach to student orientation and community service activities encourages students to think critically about their roles and responsibilities, thereby cultivating a deeper sense of solidarity and empathy.

Lastly, collective consciousness theory (Durkheim, 1893) posits that shared beliefs, values, and norms are essential for social integration and cohesion. Programs that emphasize solidarity and collaboration among students contribute to the development of this collective consciousness, helping new students internalize social values such as tolerance, mutual respect, and communal responsibility. Together, these theories form the foundation for designing educational and social programs aimed at strengthening solidarity and enhancing the social roles of new students within both the university and the wider community.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The implementation of this community service activity adopts a participatory-educative approach, systematically designed to achieve the main objective: to strengthen the solidarity of new students in fulfilling their social roles within the campus community and the broader environment. This approach is considered the most effective in fostering student awareness and engagement through dialogical and experience-based learning processes.

The activity method consists of several interrelated stages. The first stage is planning and preparation, beginning with problem identification through observations and internal discussions between lecturers and the board of the Public Administration Student Association (HIMAPLIK). During this stage, the team developed a proposal, defined the main theme, and designed the event flow that integrates educational content with solidarity-building activities.**

The second stage involves technical and logistical coordination, including the drafting and sending of invitations, activity scheduling, selecting speakers from among the permanent lecturers, and preparing the venue at the Teaching Farm of Dehasen University Bengkulu. This stage also includes assigning tasks to the organizing committee and HIMAPLIK members.

The third stage is the core implementation phase, carried out through the "Malam Keakraban" (Makrab) program involving all new students and HIMAPLIK members as active participants. The activities consisted of thematic lectures, group discussions, and value reflection sessions. The speakers presented materials related to the four main roles of students in society—agent of change, social control, iron stock, and moral force—followed by Q&A sessions and open discussions to deepen understanding and foster togetherness among participants.

The fourth stage is evaluation, conducted through direct observation of participant dynamics, assessment of responses during the event, and internal committee discussions regarding the

effectiveness of the methods used. Verbal feedback from participants was also collected as input for future program improvements.

To achieve the main goal of strengthening new students' solidarity in performing their social roles, the entire activity was designed through four integrated stages. Each stage reflects a process that is not only logically operational but also relevant to the character-building needs of new university students.

The first stage began with planning and problem identification. During this phase, the service team and HIMAPLIK conducted a preliminary survey to map common issues faced by new students—particularly the lack of social bonds and limited understanding of student roles. The survey results were discussed in an internal forum to formulate a theme that addressed these issues effectively. The team then drafted a comprehensive proposal with a formal implementation schedule.

The second stage was technical coordination and logistical preparation. Invitations were sent to selected speakers—permanent lecturers from the Public Administration Program. The team selected an interactive and supportive venue, the Teaching Farm, as the event location. In addition, essential tools such as sound systems, stationery, and documentation equipment were procured.

The third stage, which was the core of the service process, was the event execution. The activity began with thematic lectures by lecturers who elaborated on the strategic roles of students as agent of change, social control, iron stock, and moral force. Following the lectures, participants engaged in group discussions and value reflection sessions to internalize these concepts more deeply. To reinforce social interaction and teamwork, the event also included collaborative games designed to foster unity and solidarity among participants.

The final stage was evaluation and documentation, involving direct observation of student participation and engagement during the event, followed by an internal committee evaluation meeting to assess the effectiveness of the methods used. Finally, the team prepared a comprehensive report documenting the outcomes, along with suggestions for improvement in future activities.

Overall, these four stages demonstrate a strong interconnection between planning, implementation, and evaluation within a systematic framework. This structured WBS (Work Breakdown Structure) narrative not only reflects the technical strategy of the activity but also illustrates how the process of solidarity-building can be effectively developed through a contextual and applicable step-by-step approach.

RESULTS

The implementation of the community service activity, packaged in the form of Malam Keakraban (Makrab) with the theme Strengthening Solidarity in Enhancing the Role of New Students in Society, has resulted in various strategic achievements aligned with the activity's goals, namely raising social awareness and strengthening solidarity among new students as the foundation for academic and societal character formation. These results emerged from a series of activities carried out systematically based on the stages outlined in the previously designed work breakdown structure.

The first achievement lies in the success of the problem identification stage and the development of the activity plan. Through the initial survey conducted by the HIMAPLIK board, qualitative data were obtained regarding the low social interaction among new students and the minimal understanding of the four basic roles of students: as agents of change, social control, iron stock, and moral force. This data became the foundation for the design of the Makrab program, which was not only oriented toward informal interaction but also the transfer of values and the instilling of collective awareness.

Furthermore, success was also evident in the logistical and technical aspects of the event. The activity held at the Teaching Farm of Dehasen University Bengkulu proved to be effective in creating an open, comfortable environment that supported social learning among participants. The selection of this open and informal venue psychologically provided a safe space for new students to actively participate without the structural pressures typically found in classroom settings. This was an important point in the context of an experiential learning approach that places participants as subjects in the value-building process (Kolb, 1984).

In the core implementation phase, the thematic lecture sessions delivered by lecturers from the Public Administration Study Program successfully raised important issues related to students' contributions to society, as well as awakening participants to the urgency of their roles as agents of social transformation. The material was not only delivered in a one-way format but was followed by group discussions that elicited critical responses from the participants. The new students were able to respond to the issues with reflective perspectives and asked questions that indicated a good level of understanding of the material presented.

One notable outcome from the discussion session was the awareness raised about the importance of active student involvement in extracurricular social activities, including community service, campus organizations, and collaborative initiatives across faculties. Some participants proposed the creation of regular forums between different student cohorts as a platform for exchanging ideas and strengthening the internal network of new students. This demonstrates cognitive and affective development in new students in internalizing the values of solidarity and cooperation as the foundation for their social relations on campus.

The aspect of strengthening solidarity was further evident in the collaborative games designed to facilitate social interactions naturally. This activity not only served as a relaxation break in the event series but also functioned as a non-verbal learning medium on the importance of communication, teamwork, and trust among participants. Observations showed that previously passive students began to show initiative and active involvement within the group. This strengthens the assumption that social interactions in informal settings can accelerate the formation of social cohesion among individuals who had not previously known each other (Tuckman, 1965).

From a documentation perspective, the entire process was well recorded. Administrative data, such as attendance lists, activity photos, discussion session minutes, and internal evaluation results, were compiled as part of the final report. This documentation serves not only as academic and administrative accountability to the institution but also as a valuable source of data for the development of future, more sustainable and evidence-based programs.

In general, the implementation of this activity has had a tangible positive impact, marked by an increased understanding of new students regarding their social functions and responsibilities. Additionally, the growth of the spirit to foster collaboration between cohorts and organizations, as well as the development of more inclusive communication patterns among participants, indicates that the approach used in this activity successfully addressed the goals of community service, particularly in the aspects of character formation and strengthening the social and moral capacity of new students.

DISCUSSIONS

The community service activity focused on strengthening solidarity among new students has proven to effectively address the main issues identified in the initial phase, namely low social interaction, weak understanding of student roles, and a lack of a sense of togetherness among individuals in the new student group. A series of educational and participatory activities successfully encouraged a tangible transformation in participants' attitudes and mindsets, as reflected in the success indicators obtained during the activity.

The main indicators of success can be seen in three important aspects. First, the increased active participation of new students in the discussion sessions and collaborative games reflects a shift from passive attitudes to active involvement. Second, the emergence of participants' initiative to express their opinions and propose social work programs independently shows the development of initial awareness of their social responsibilities. Third, interactions, which were initially formal and awkward, began to change into an open communication pattern characterized by mutual support and respect for individual differences.

This achievement cannot be separated from the internal strengths possessed by the activity implementation team. The active involvement of HIMAPLIK board members and lecturers from the Public Administration Study Program was a major strength that ensured the activity was directed, educational, and reflective. The availability of human resources experienced in facilitating discussion forums and activities for new student development was also an important asset in creating an environment conducive to social learning.

On the other hand, external opportunities helped strengthen the achievement of the activity's results. One such opportunity was the institutional support from the Faculty of Social Sciences and the LPPM of Dehasen University Bengkulu, which facilitated logistical and administrative needs. Furthermore, the tendency of new students, who were in the phase of searching for their social identity, provided a timely moment to instill values of solidarity, leadership, and social contribution early on. This moment became a highly effective opportunity to lay the foundation for students' social character.

However, this activity also faced some internal weaknesses that should be considered for future improvements. One of the weaknesses was the limited time for implementation, as the activity only lasted for two days and one night. The relatively short duration meant that some of the material could not be discussed in more depth and thoroughly. Additionally, the lack of a post-activity monitoring system resulted in the follow-up process on the new students' attitude changes being less systematically observed.

External obstacles also appeared in the form of motivation gaps among participants. Some students showed high enthusiasm, while others remained passive or only minimally involved. This was influenced by social background, personality, and initial experiences of students in the campus environment. These differences posed a challenge for facilitators to create an equitable space for all participants to grow and develop together.

Nevertheless, the results of the activity show that, overall, the method of strengthening solidarity through a dialogical, reflective, and participatory approach was effective in addressing the social issues faced by new students. This approach not only provided space for the internalization of social values but also encouraged students to directly practice these values through real interactions and teamwork. By considering the weaknesses and obstacles that arose, similar activities in the future can be improved in terms of duration, depth of material, and the mechanism for continuous mentoring to ensure that the impact is more measurable and sustainable.

CONCLUSIONS

The community service activity focused on strengthening solidarity among new students has successfully addressed the main issues identified during the initial phase, namely low social interaction, weak understanding of student roles, and a lack of sense of togetherness among individuals within the new student group. A series of educational and participatory activities successfully facilitated a tangible transformation in the attitudes and mindsets of participants, as reflected in the success indicators obtained during the activity.

The primary success indicators can be seen in three important aspects. First, the increased active participation of new students in the discussion sessions and collaborative games reflects a shift from passive behavior to active involvement. Second, the emergence of participants' initiatives to express their opinions and propose social work programs independently indicates the development of early awareness of their social responsibilities. Third, interactions, which were initially formal and awkward, began to evolve into an open communication pattern characterized by mutual support and respect for individual differences.

This achievement is inseparable from the internal strengths possessed by the activity implementation team. The active involvement of HIMAPLIK board members and lecturers from the Public Administration Study Program played a major role in ensuring that the activity was directed, educational, and reflective. The availability of human resources experienced in facilitating discussion forums and new student development activities was also an important asset in creating an environment conducive to social learning.

On the other hand, external opportunities further reinforced the achievement of the activity's results. One such opportunity was the institutional support from the Faculty of Social Sciences and the LPPM of Dehasen University Bengkulu, which facilitated logistical and administrative needs. Furthermore, the tendency of new students, who were in the phase of searching for their social identity, provided an opportune moment to instill values of solidarity, leadership, and social contribution early on. This moment proved to be a highly effective opportunity to lay the foundation for students' social character.

However, this activity also faced some internal weaknesses that should be addressed for future improvements. One such weakness was the limited time allocated for the activity, which lasted only two days and one night. The relatively short duration meant that some of the material could not be explored in more depth. Additionally, the lack of a post-activity monitoring system resulted in the follow-up process regarding the changes in new students' attitudes being less systematically tracked.

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The community service activity focused on strengthening solidarity among new students made a significant contribution in addressing the social issues that have long hindered students' active roles within the campus and society. One of the most important results of this activity was the emergence of early awareness among new students regarding their strategic roles as agents of change, social controllers, future leaders, and moral exemplars. This awareness was gained through a series of educational activities that were designed to be participatory and reflective, such as thematic lectures, group discussions, and collaborative games.

The increased involvement of students in dialogue forums and the emergence of initiatives to build cross-batch communication show that this activity was not only effective as a medium for strengthening solidarity but also as a means for character building. The active participation from new students indicates that the values of solidarity, leadership, and social responsibility have begun to be internalized within them.

The success of this activity was strongly supported by internal strengths such as the synergy between lecturers, HIMAPLIK board members, and students as participants. Additionally, external support from the campus institution and the psychological momentum of new students who were forming their social identity accelerated the internalization of values.

However, some weaknesses and obstacles need to be addressed in the implementation of similar activities in the future. The time limitation prevented all materials from being explored in depth, and the lack of a follow-up mentoring system means the long-term effects of the activity have not been fully monitored. Additionally, the motivation gap among participants indicates the need for more adaptive facilitation strategies to engage all participants equally.

Based on these reflections, it is recommended that future solidarity-strengthening activities for new students be conducted with a longer duration and supported by a continuous mentoring module. A mapping of the characters and needs of new students should also be carried out prior to the activity so that the facilitation methods applied can be adapted contextually. Furthermore, involving alumni or senior students as informal facilitators could be an alternative to strengthen social bonds and expand cross-generational dialogue among students. By making these adjustments, it is hoped that similar community service activities will not only become symbolic annual events but will truly become social interventions that have a lasting impact on the character development of new students and strengthen the academic culture based on values of solidarity, participation, and social responsibility.

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Conflict of Interests

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