



HERITAGE EDUCATION-BASED SERVICE LEARNING MODEL: AN EXPERIENTIAL STUDY ON THE PORTUGUESE SHIP "FLOR DE LA MAR", MELAKA, MALAYSIA

MODEL PEMBELAJARAN LAYANAN BERBASIS PENDIDIKAN WARISAN: STUDI EKSPERIMEN DI ATAS KAPAL PORTUGAL "FLOR DE LA MAR", MELAKA, MALAYSIA

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.62567/micjo.v3i3.2560>

Abstract

Heritage education-based community engagement serves as an approach that integrates historical understanding, cultural values, and social responsibility through direct experiential learning at heritage sites. This Service Learning program was conducted at the Portuguese Ship “Flor De La Mar” in Melaka, Malaysia, with the aim of strengthening students' heritage literacy while supporting the museum in enriching its educational and interpretive materials. The activities included field observation, guided cultural learning, collaboration in developing basic informational content, and structured student reflections. The program enhanced students' understanding of Melaka's maritime history, multicultural exchanges, and the importance of cultural heritage preservation. Additionally, the museum benefited from improved educational communication strategies and increased use of digital media for public engagement. The program also encouraged greater involvement of local communities and young visitors in appreciating the historical significance of Flor De La Mar. Overall, this heritage education-based Service Learning initiative strengthened contextual learning, cultivated cultural awareness among students, and fostered sustainable collaboration between the university and the heritage management community.

Keywords : Service Learning, Heritage Education, Flor De La Mar, Cultural Literacy.

Abstrak

Keterlibatan masyarakat berbasis pendidikan warisan budaya berfungsi sebagai pendekatan yang mengintegrasikan pemahaman sejarah, nilai-nilai budaya, dan tanggung jawab sosial melalui pembelajaran pengalaman langsung di situs warisan budaya. Program Pembelajaran Layanan ini dilaksanakan di Kapal Portugis “Flor De La Mar” di Melaka, Malaysia, dengan tujuan memperkuat literasi warisan budaya mahasiswa sekaligus mendukung museum dalam memperkaya materi pendidikan dan interpretasinya. Kegiatan tersebut meliputi observasi lapangan, pembelajaran budaya terbimbing, kolaborasi dalam mengembangkan konten informasi dasar, dan refleksi mahasiswa yang terstruktur. Program ini meningkatkan pemahaman mahasiswa tentang sejarah maritim Melaka, pertukaran multikultural, dan pentingnya pelestarian warisan budaya. Selain itu, museum memperoleh



manfaat dari peningkatan strategi komunikasi pendidikan dan peningkatan penggunaan media digital untuk keterlibatan publik. Program ini juga mendorong keterlibatan yang lebih besar dari masyarakat lokal dan pengunjung muda dalam menghargai signifikansi sejarah Flor De La Mar. Secara keseluruhan, inisiatif Pembelajaran Layanan berbasis pendidikan warisan budaya ini memperkuat pembelajaran kontekstual, menumbuhkan kesadaran budaya di kalangan mahasiswa, dan mendorong kolaborasi berkelanjutan antara universitas dan komunitas manajemen warisan budaya.

Kata Kunci : Pembelajaran Berbasis Pelayanan, Pendidikan Warisan Budaya, Flor De La Mar, Literasi Budaya.

1. INTRODUCTION

Heritage education is a learning approach that connects historical knowledge, cultural values, and public awareness of the importance of preserving national heritage (Resch & Schritteser, 2023; Smith, 2020). Heritage-based learning emphasizes not only academic understanding but also fosters a sense of social responsibility through students' direct involvement in cultural site preservation activities. In Malaysia, particularly in the Melaka region, which has been recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site, heritage education is a crucial component in supporting cultural identity and sustainable tourism.

One of Malacca's key maritime heritage sites is the Portuguese ship Flor De La Mar, a replica of a 16th-century ship depicting the history of international trade and multicultural interactions between the Portuguese, Malays, Arabs, Chinese, and other nations (Kasim et al., 2019). This museum serves as an educational space for understanding the dynamics of colonialism, the development of Southeast Asian maritime networks, and Malacca's contribution to world history. However, the educational potential of Flor De La Mar has not been optimally utilized. Challenges include limited interpretive materials, lack of participation from the younger generation, and the need to increase the capacity of museum managers to present historical information interactively (Aldridge, 2021; Rahman et al., 2020).

Various community service programs have previously focused on cultural heritage preservation, but most still emphasize historical documentation and general outreach activities. A gap that emerged was the lack of community service programs that integrate experiential learning and direct service learning at heritage sites to enhance students' understanding of historical sites while simultaneously providing concrete contributions to museum management. A learning model that combines active student involvement with community needs is needed to bridge the gap between theory, field practice, and the needs of cultural heritage preservation. The Service Learning (SL) approach is seen as a relevant strategy to address these challenges. Through SL, students not only learn theory in the classroom but also act as partners in providing educational services, developing informational materials, and strengthening community capacity (Coelho & Menezes, 2021; Fauzi et al., 2021). When applied to the Flor De La Mar site, SL allows students to engage in cultural interpretation, historical observation, educational assistance for visitors, and the development of simple digital content that benefits the museum. This process aligns with the concept of experiential learning (Kolb, 2018), which emphasizes learning through direct experience, reflection, and the application of concepts in real-world situations.

Based on this background, this program aims to:

1. improve students' ability to understand historical sites and students' learning experiences through educational activities at Flor De La Mar;
2. supporting the strengthening of the interpretive capacity of museum managers through the preparation of information materials and the use of digital media; and
3. Encourage community involvement and young visitors in preserving Melaka's maritime heritage.

The primary contribution of this service activity lies in integrating academic learning with cultural heritage preservation, providing tangible support to museums, and strengthening ongoing



collaboration between universities, local communities, and heritage site management institutions. Thus, this program is expected to become a model for effective and relevant service learning implementation to support the development of cultural tourism and the preservation of community historical identities”.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

This community service activity is carried out through four main stages which refer to the community service method guidelines, namely the planning, implementation, evaluation, and reflection and reporting stages.

1. The planning phase began with problem identification and a needs analysis for the Flor De La Mar Portuguese Ship Museum, particularly regarding the need to provide interpretive materials and educational support for young visitors. This phase involved coordination with the museum, establishing activity objectives, developing a schedule for the educational visit, and assigning student tasks to ensure a systematic process.
2. The implementation phase is carried out through direct visits to the museum, where students are involved in observing the collection, documenting the exhibits, and providing educational support to visitors. Students also help compile historical information content in the form of interpretive notes and simple visual documentation. All activities are designed to provide direct learning experiences through an experiential learning approach, where learning occurs through concrete experiences and reflection on those experiences (Kolb, 2018). This approach allows students to deeply understand historical and cultural values through direct involvement at cultural heritage sites.
3. The evaluation phase assesses the implementation of the activity, its level of usefulness to the museum, and student responses to the learning experience. The evaluation includes feedback from museum staff regarding the support provided to students and observations on the effectiveness of the delivery of educational information to visitors.
4. The final stage is reflection and reporting, where students reflect on the knowledge, communication skills, and cultural awareness developed during the activity. This reflection is used to compile a final community service report as a form of academic accountability and as a recommendation for future collaborative activities between the university and the museum.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Community service activities carried out at the Flor De La Mar Portuguese Ship Museum have yielded significant results in improving students' understanding of historical sites, strengthening the museum's educational capacity, and engaging the community in understanding the value of Malacca's maritime history. The Flor De La Mar itself was a 16th-century Portuguese warship that played a role in Alfonso de Albuquerque's expedition during the conquest of Malacca in 1511. This ship became an important symbol of the international trade era in the Malacca Strait and reflected the multicultural interactions between the Portuguese, Malays, Arabs, Indians, and Chinese. The ship's replica, now used as a museum, displays maritime artifacts, trade route maps, colonial documentation, and representations of cultural journeys that shaped the social dynamics of Malacca's coastal communities. This information serves as a primary foundation for students in understanding the historical context, colonialism, and the development of Southeast Asian maritime civilization.



Figure 1. Students Make A Visit

One important outcome of the activity was the documentation of the program's implementation, including observations of the ship's structure and exhibition spaces, as well as student interactions with museum staff and visitors. This documentation not only illustrates the process but also provides a visual understanding of the museum's status as an educational space and historical tourism destination. Photos of the museum's exterior and the ship's appearance at night demonstrate how this location has a strong visual and educational appeal for the public.



Figure 2. Inside the Museum

In terms of learning, students gain hands-on experience that enriches their understanding of Malacca's maritime history and the multicultural values reflected in the museum's artifacts and information panels. Observing artifacts helps students connect historical theory to real-world contexts, thus enhancing their ability to interpret historical sources. Through an experiential learning approach, students not only view the collection but also understand the symbolic value contained within the maritime exhibits. Furthermore, interactions with museum staff strengthen students' communication skills, particularly in conveying historical information to young visitors.

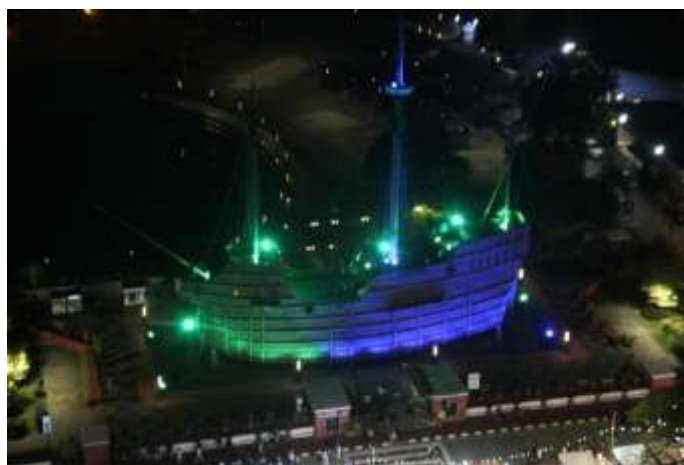


Figure 3. Museum Complex at night

This community service activity also had a tangible impact on the museum. Students supported the development of simple interpretive materials and provided input on the presentation of historical information to make it more engaging and understandable for visitors. The museum benefited from the students' transfer of digital skills, particularly regarding the use of social media to disseminate educational content. Student support in documenting the museum's collections also helped the museum improve the accessibility of information to visitors through visual and digital media.

The impact of the activities on the community was also evident, especially among young visitors who showed great enthusiasm when students explained the history of ships and maritime trade in a more interactive way. Schoolchildren who visited the museum reported that they found it easier to understand the history because the students' communication approach was simpler and more engaging. This strengthened the museum's role as a center for public education and raised public awareness of the importance of preserving Malacca's cultural heritage.

For the students themselves, this activity provided a reflective experience that fostered cultural awareness, social empathy, and a sense of responsibility for preserving the nation's history. Through individual and group reflection, students realized that their involvement in museum activities not only enriched their academic knowledge but also shaped their character and concern for the past as a foundation for national identity. Overall, the results of the activity demonstrated that this Service Learning program was able to connect academic learning with real-life experiences, contribute to the museum, and strengthen the relationship between the university and the cultural heritage site management community.

Discussion

The implementation of heritage education-based service learning at the Flor De La Mar Portuguese Ship Museum demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach in connecting academic theory with real-life experiences that are socially and culturally relevant. Students' direct involvement at the cultural heritage site allows them to understand Malacca's maritime history more contextually, compared to learning conducted solely in the classroom. This aligns with the concept of experiential learning, where concrete experiences form the basis for reflection and the formation of new understandings. Students' experiences observing artifacts, interpreting historical exhibits, and interacting with visitors demonstrate how learning occurs through active engagement in real-world situations.

From a heritage education perspective, this activity demonstrates that museums can be effective interdisciplinary learning spaces. Students not only learn historical aspects but also connect them to cultural values, local community identity, and the dynamics of colonialism that influenced the development of Malacca. Understanding the Flor De La Mar ship as a symbol of cultural exchange and global trade networks broadens students' understanding of the relationship between global history



and local identity. This understanding is crucial for developing heritage literacy, the ability to interpret the symbolic value of a historical object and its role in shaping community identity.

The results of the activity indicate that Service Learning also serves as a means of empowering the community, specifically museum managers and visitors. Students contributed to the development of interpretive materials, educational support, and the enhancement of digital media utilization. These contributions helped the museum improve the quality of historical information delivery, making the learning experience more engaging for visitors. Furthermore, the interaction between students and the community fostered increased public awareness of the importance of preserving cultural heritage. The enthusiastic participation of young visitors in student explanations indicates that an interactive educational approach is more effective than passive information presentation.

Socially, this activity strengthens the relationship between the university, the museum, and the community. The presence of students as educational agents helps the museum overcome resource limitations in providing more personalized educational services to visitors. This collaboration creates a mutually beneficial relationship: the museum receives support from human resources and creative ideas, while students gain a space to develop communication skills, cultural empathy, and collaboration skills. Thus, service learning becomes a relevant learning model to support the preservation of cultural heritage while strengthening the participation of the younger generation in preserving historical values.

This discussion demonstrates that the integration of heritage education with service learning not only results in academic improvement but also impacts social, cultural, and community aspects. This program successfully provides a means for students to engage in real-life cultural preservation, while simultaneously supporting museums in improving the quality of their educational services. These results confirm that service learning can be a strategic approach to bridge the gap between theory and practice, as well as a relevant collaborative learning model for the development of cultural tourism and the preservation of local history. Through this approach, service becomes not only an activity of sharing knowledge, but also a process of character building, strengthening cultural identity, and sustainable community empowerment.

4. CONCLUSION

This community service activity demonstrates that the implementation of a Heritage Education-Based Service Learning Model at the Portuguese Ship "Flor De La Mar" site in Melaka has had a significant positive impact on students, the museum management institution, and the local community. This approach successfully integrates academic learning, cultural preservation, and community empowerment into one meaningful collaborative activity.

1. The heritage education-based service learning program at the Flor De La Mar Portuguese Ship Museum has successfully enhanced students' understanding of historical sites, particularly Malacca's maritime history, the dynamics of colonialism, and the multicultural values that shape local identity. Through hands-on experience, students gain contextual understanding that cannot be achieved through classroom learning.
2. Community service activities have made a significant contribution to the museum, particularly in developing interpretive materials, providing educational visual content, and supporting the enhancement of digital media utilization. Collaboration between students and museum staff has also helped enrich the strategy for presenting historical information to make it more engaging for visitors, including school students.
3. This program has had a positive impact on the community and young visitors, as the students' hands-on presentation of historical information has been shown to increase their interest and understanding of the importance of Malacca's cultural heritage. This activity also strengthens the museum's role as a center for public education and a space for intergenerational learning.
4. From a student competency development perspective, this activity helps improve communication skills, historical interpretation, cultural empathy, teamwork, and social responsibility. Student



reflections indicate that this community service activity plays a role in fostering a caring attitude toward cultural heritage preservation.

Collaboration between universities, museums, and local communities demonstrates the immense potential of the service learning model as a sustainable approach to learning and service. This program can be used as an effective implementation model to support the development of cultural tourism, the preservation of historical heritage, and the development of student character as agents of social change

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