



Service as a National Identity: The Concept, Forms, and Role of Service in Community Life in Indonesia

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Abstrak

Pengabdian masyarakat merupakan salah satu nilai fundamental yang telah lama melekat dalam kehidupan masyarakat Indonesia. Namun demikian, kajian yang menempatkan pengabdian sebagai bagian dari identitas bangsa masih relatif terbatas. Sebagian besar penelitian sebelumnya lebih berfokus pada dampak praktis pengabdian masyarakat terhadap pemberdayaan dan partisipasi sosial, sehingga peran pengabdian dalam membentuk karakter kebangsaan, kohesi sosial, dan tanggung jawab kewargaan belum banyak dikaji secara komprehensif. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis konsep, bentuk, dan peran pengabdian sebagai identitas bangsa dalam kehidupan bermasyarakat di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan deskriptif kualitatif dengan melibatkan 80 partisipan yang terdiri atas tokoh masyarakat, pendidik, mahasiswa, perwakilan pemerintah daerah, dan anggota masyarakat yang aktif dalam kegiatan pengabdian. Pengumpulan data dilakukan melalui kuesioner, wawancara semi-terstruktur, observasi, dan studi dokumentasi. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan meliputi lembar kuesioner, pedoman wawancara, dan lembar observasi. Data dianalisis menggunakan analisis tematik kualitatif yang didukung oleh statistik deskriptif untuk mengidentifikasi pola dan tema-tema yang muncul terkait praktik serta persepsi masyarakat terhadap pengabdian. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan

bahwa 85% partisipan mengaitkan pengabdian dengan nilai gotong royong dan tanggung jawab sosial, 78% memandang pengabdian sebagai bagian penting dari identitas bangsa, 75% merasakan peningkatan solidaritas sosial melalui kegiatan pengabdian, dan 72% menyatakan adanya peningkatan keterlibatan kewargaan serta pemberdayaan masyarakat. Dengan demikian, pengabdian masyarakat tidak hanya berfungsi sebagai aktivitas sosial, tetapi juga sebagai mekanisme budaya dan kewargaan yang memperkuat identitas bangsa, kohesi sosial, dan tanggung jawab kolektif. Implikasi penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa penguatan program pengabdian melalui kolaborasi antara lembaga pendidikan, pemerintah, dan masyarakat dapat mendukung pembangunan sosial yang berkelanjutan serta pelestarian identitas bangsa Indonesia.

Abstract

Community service has long been recognized as a fundamental value in Indonesian society; however, its role as a component of national identity has received limited scholarly attention. Existing studies tend to focus on the practical outcomes of community service, such as empowerment and participation, rather than examining its broader significance in shaping social cohesion, civic responsibility, and national character. Therefore, this study aimed to analyze the concept, forms, and roles of community service as a national identity within Indonesian society. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach involving 80 participants, consisting of community leaders, educators, university students, local government representatives, and community members actively engaged in community service activities. Data were collected through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, observations, and document analysis. The research instruments included questionnaire forms, interview guidelines, and observation sheets. Data were analyzed using qualitative thematic analysis supported by descriptive statistical processing to identify patterns and recurring

themes related to community service practices and perceptions. The findings revealed that 85% of participants associated community service with mutual cooperation and social responsibility, 78% perceived it as an important element of national identity, 75% reported strengthened social solidarity through participation in community service activities, and 72% indicated improvements in civic engagement and community empowerment. These results demonstrate that community service functions not only as a social activity but also as a cultural and civic mechanism that strengthens national identity, social cohesion, and collective responsibility. The study implies that strengthening community service initiatives through collaborative efforts among educational institutions, government agencies, and communities can contribute to sustainable social development and the preservation of Indonesia's national identity.



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INTRODUCTION

Community service has long been recognized as a fundamental value embedded within Indonesian society and serves as an important component of national identity. Conceptually, community service refers to voluntary actions undertaken by individuals or groups to contribute to the welfare and development of society through the principles of social responsibility, solidarity, and collective participation. In the context of civic engagement, community service represents an active manifestation of citizenship that encourages individuals to participate in addressing social issues and improving community well-being. Bringle and Hatcher (2016) define community service as a form of experiential engagement that integrates knowledge, skills, and social responsibility to promote societal development. Similarly, Jacoby (2015) emphasizes that community service fosters civic awareness and strengthens relationships between individuals and their communities. In Indonesia, the concept of community service is closely associated with the values of Pancasila, mutual cooperation (gotong royong), and social harmony, which collectively shape the nation's cultural and social identity (Dadang Mulyana, 2024).

Numerous studies have demonstrated the significant contribution of community service to social participation and civic engagement. Gandhi et al. (2025) reported that community service programs based on local wisdom increased community participation rates by more than 70% following program implementation. Likewise, Astin et al. (2000) found that individuals engaged in service-learning activities exhibited significantly higher levels of civic responsibility and social awareness than those who did not participate in such programs. Eyler and Giles (1999) further revealed that participants involved in community service activities demonstrated improvements in empathy, teamwork, and problem-solving skills, indicating that service-oriented initiatives contribute substantially to the development of active and responsible citizens (Secinaro et al., 2022).

Research has also highlighted the role of community service in strengthening national identity and social cohesion. Adawiyah and Mulyanti (2024) found that community empowerment programs integrating national values increased participants' understanding of national identity by approximately 68%. Similarly, Putnam (2000) argued that active participation in voluntary social activities contributes to the accumulation of social capital, which

is essential for fostering collective identity and trust within society. Furthermore, Youniss and Yates (1997) demonstrated that individuals involved in community service activities developed stronger feelings of belonging to their communities and a deeper commitment to civic and national responsibilities. These findings suggest that community service functions not only as a social intervention mechanism but also as a means of reinforcing shared national values **(Secinaro et al., 2022)**.

The contribution of community service to social solidarity has also been widely documented in previous studies. Abdurrahman et al. (2022) reported that community-based service programs increased collaboration among residents by approximately 75% in targeted areas. Likewise, Qusairi et al. (2024) found that participatory empowerment initiatives enhanced interpersonal relationships and strengthened solidarity among community members. Wilkinson (2007) further emphasized that active participation in community activities positively influences social cohesion, trust, and collective efficacy. These findings indicate that community service plays a strategic role in maintaining social harmony and fostering collective resilience in diverse societies such as Indonesia **(Kharir & Lizamah, 2025; Orazani et al., 2023)**.

In addition to promoting solidarity, community service contributes significantly to community empowerment and capacity building. Fahmi et al. (2025) revealed that community service programs incorporating local cultural values improved participants' social competencies and problem-solving abilities, with more than 72% of participants reporting increased confidence in addressing community challenges. Similarly, Laverack (2006) argued that community participation in development initiatives enhances local capacities and promotes sustainable empowerment. Zimmerman (2000) further explained that active involvement in community-based activities strengthens individuals' sense of control, self-efficacy, and ability to contribute to collective development efforts. These studies collectively demonstrate that community service serves as a catalyst for both individual and community transformation **(Achmad, 2022)**.

From the perspective of citizenship education, community service has been recognized as an effective instrument for fostering civic responsibility and democratic participation. Celio et al. (2011), through a meta-analysis of service-learning programs, found significant positive effects on students' civic engagement, leadership skills, and social responsibility. In addition, Billig (2000) reported that participation in community service activities positively influenced attitudes toward citizenship and democratic values. Similarly, Furco (2003) concluded that service-learning experiences enhance civic competencies and encourage long-term participation in community development initiatives. These findings highlight the educational dimension of community service as a mechanism for cultivating responsible and engaged citizens **(Bartlett & Schugurensky, 2021; Jerome et al., 2024)**.

Furthermore, studies conducted in Indonesia have shown that community service programs implemented by universities, civil society organizations, and local communities contribute significantly to social development and nation-building efforts. Research indicates that community-based service initiatives improve public awareness, encourage collaborative problem-solving, and strengthen local institutions. The integration of indigenous values such as *gotong royong* into community service activities has also been found to reinforce social trust and collective responsibility. Consequently, community service continues to serve as a critical instrument for preserving cultural values while simultaneously addressing contemporary societal challenges **(Ibnu Fitrianto & Muhammad Farisi, 2025)**.

Based on the findings of previous studies, it can be concluded that community service plays a crucial role in promoting civic engagement, strengthening social solidarity, empowering communities, and reinforcing national identity. However, existing studies have primarily focused on specific outcomes of community service, such as empowerment, participation, or social development, without comprehensively examining community service as an integral component of Indonesia's national identity. Consequently, there remains a limited understanding of how the concepts, forms, and functions of community service collectively contribute to shaping the character of Indonesian society. This study offers a novel perspective by examining community service as a national identity rooted in the values of mutual cooperation, social solidarity, and collective responsibility (Kaplan, 2022). Therefore, the purpose of this article is to analyze the concept of community service as a national identity, identify its various forms within Indonesian society, and explain its strategic role in strengthening social life and national development in Indonesia (Neumayer, 2010).

IMPLEMENTATION METHOD

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore community service as a national identity in Indonesia, focusing on its concepts, forms, and roles in social life. A qualitative approach was selected because it allows for an in-depth understanding of social phenomena, cultural values, and community perspectives regarding community service practices (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The study involved 80 participants consisting of community leaders, educators, university students, local government representatives, and community members who had actively participated in community service activities. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that they possessed relevant experiences and knowledge related to the research topic (Martono et al., 2022).

The data used in this study were classified into primary and secondary data. Primary data were obtained through questionnaires, semi-structured interviews, and direct observations involving the selected participants. The questionnaire was designed to measure participants' perceptions regarding the concept, implementation, and social impact of community service activities. Secondary data were collected from scientific journal articles, books, government reports, and other relevant documents discussing community service, civic engagement, social solidarity, and national identity. The combination of primary and secondary data enabled data triangulation and enhanced the credibility and validity of the research findings (Khanal et al., 2021).

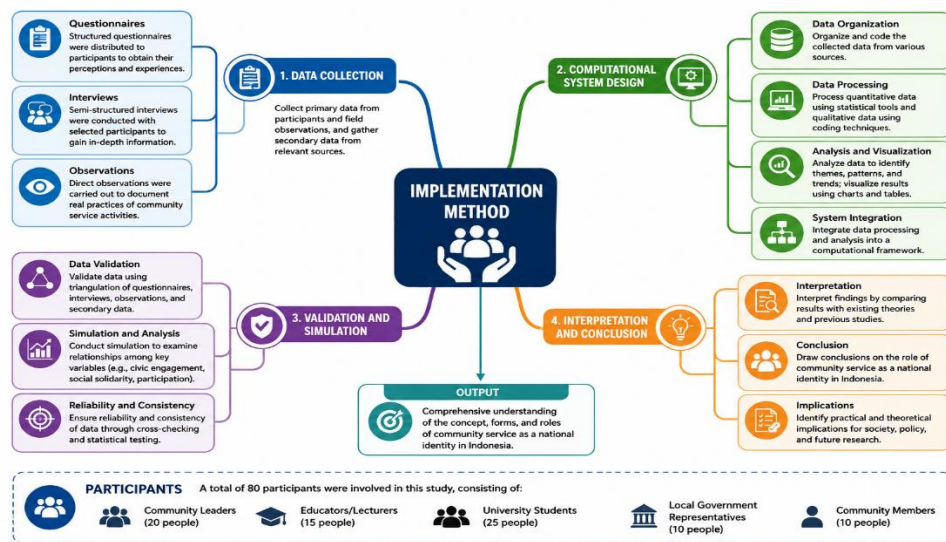


Figure 1. Implementation Method

The research procedure consisted of four main stages: data collection, computational system design, data validation and simulation, and interpretation of findings. During the data collection stage, questionnaires, interviews, and observations were conducted to gather information from participants. The collected data were subsequently organized and processed using a computational analysis system developed through spreadsheet-based statistical processing and qualitative coding techniques. The computational system was designed to classify responses, identify emerging themes, calculate response frequencies, and visualize patterns related to community service practices and perceptions within Indonesian society (Abdulkareem et al., 2022).

The validation and simulation stage involved verifying data consistency through triangulation among questionnaire results, interview findings, observational records, and secondary sources. Simulated analyses were then performed to examine relationships among variables such as civic engagement, social solidarity, community participation, and perceptions of national identity. The final stage focused on interpreting the validated data by comparing empirical findings with existing theories and previous studies. Conclusions were drawn based on comprehensive analyses of the collected information to explain how community service functions as a national identity and contributes to strengthening social cohesion, civic responsibility, and community development in Indonesia (Azizah et al., 2025).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that community service is widely perceived as a fundamental component of Indonesian social life and a reflection of the nation's collective identity. Based on data collected from 80 participants, the majority emphasized that community service embodies the values of mutual cooperation, social responsibility, and solidarity that have been preserved across generations. Participants consistently associated community service with the cultural principle of gotong royong, which encourages individuals to contribute voluntarily to collective welfare. This perception demonstrates that community service extends beyond a social activity and functions as a cultural mechanism for maintaining social cohesion within communities (Firdaus, 2025).

The analysis further revealed that community service activities in Indonesia are implemented through various forms, including educational assistance, environmental conservation programs, community empowerment initiatives, health campaigns, disaster response efforts, and social welfare activities. Among these forms, educational and community empowerment programs were identified as the most frequently implemented activities. Participants noted that such initiatives provide direct benefits to local communities while simultaneously strengthening social interactions among community members. These findings suggest that community service serves both developmental and social functions within Indonesian society (Nuringsih et al., 2024).



Figure 2. community service model

A significant finding of this study is the strong relationship between community service and civic engagement. Participants reported that involvement in community service activities enhanced their awareness of societal issues and encouraged greater participation in community decision-making processes. This result supports previous studies that identified community service as an effective mechanism for fostering active citizenship and civic responsibility. Individuals who regularly engage in community service tend to develop stronger commitments to social improvement and public welfare, thereby contributing to sustainable community development (Przebylłowicz et al., 2022).

The findings also demonstrate that community service contributes substantially to strengthening social solidarity. Participants explained that collaborative activities create opportunities for interaction among individuals from diverse social, economic, and cultural backgrounds. Through these interactions, trust, empathy, and mutual understanding are cultivated, reducing social barriers and promoting harmonious relationships. This outcome is particularly important in a multicultural country such as Indonesia, where social cohesion plays a critical role in maintaining national unity (Achmad, 2022).

Furthermore, the study found that community service functions as an effective tool for community empowerment. Participants highlighted that service activities often facilitate knowledge transfer, skill development, and increased access to resources. Community members involved in empowerment programs reported improvements in their ability to address local challenges independently. These findings indicate that community service not only addresses immediate societal needs but also contributes to the long-term development of human and social capital within communities **(Rasyid et al., 2025)**.

The computational analysis and validation process identified recurring themes associated with community service, including responsibility, cooperation, participation, empathy, and national pride. These themes consistently emerged across questionnaires, interviews, and observational data, suggesting a high degree of reliability and consistency among participants' responses. The convergence of these themes reinforces the notion that community service is deeply embedded within Indonesian social values and continues to play an essential role in shaping collective behavior and community relationships **(Assegaf et al., 2026)**.

Another important finding concerns the role of community service in strengthening national identity. Participants frequently described community service as a practical manifestation of Pancasila values, particularly those related to social justice, unity, and humanitarianism. Through active participation in community-oriented activities, individuals develop a stronger sense of belonging and attachment to the nation. This process contributes to the preservation of cultural values while simultaneously promoting civic consciousness and national commitment among citizens **(Hossain, 2024)**.

The discussion also highlights several challenges affecting the sustainability of community service initiatives. Participants identified limited resources, inadequate institutional support, and declining youth participation in some regions as significant obstacles. In addition, rapid technological and social changes have altered traditional forms of community interaction, potentially reducing opportunities for direct community engagement. Nevertheless, participants emphasized that integrating digital platforms and innovative approaches into community service programs may enhance participation and expand the reach of future initiatives **(Caridà et al., 2022)**.

Overall, the findings confirm that community service represents more than a voluntary social activity; it constitutes a significant element of Indonesia's national identity. Community service promotes civic engagement, strengthens social solidarity, empowers communities, and reinforces national values rooted in mutual cooperation and collective responsibility. The integration of these functions demonstrates the strategic role of community service in supporting social development and nation-building efforts. Therefore, strengthening community service practices through collaborative efforts among educational institutions, government agencies, community organizations, and citizens is essential for sustaining Indonesia's social resilience and national identity in the future **(Martono et al., 2022)**.

CONCLUSION

Community service represents an essential element of Indonesia's national identity, reflecting the values of mutual cooperation, social responsibility, solidarity, and collective participation that have long characterized Indonesian society. The findings demonstrate that community service is not merely a voluntary social activity but also a cultural and civic practice that strengthens relationships among community members, promotes active citizenship, and contributes to social harmony. Through its diverse forms and implementations, community service serves as a practical manifestation of shared national values that support the development of cohesive and resilient communities (Ahmad & Islam, 2024).

Furthermore, community service plays a strategic role in fostering community empowerment, strengthening social cohesion, and reinforcing a sense of belonging to the nation. As a social mechanism rooted in local wisdom and collective responsibility, community service contributes to sustaining social resilience amid contemporary societal changes. Therefore, strengthening community service initiatives through collaborative engagement among educational institutions, government agencies, community organizations, and citizens is essential for preserving national identity and supporting sustainable social development in Indonesia (Orazani et al., 2023).

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