

The English Language, Intercultural Competence, and Best Chance of Success for Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT As international migrants, Indonesian workers in Malaysia need English for daily communication and interaction. Despite the fact that many Malaysians can speak language(s) other than English, English serves as a second language in the country. In addition, there are Indonesian workers in Malaysia who should make contact with people from different parts of the world at some workplaces due to global industries and businesses. However, Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Malaysia reported that some Indonesian workers in that country experience legal cases, including those attributed to language and cultural barriers. This community service aimed to develop awareness of this issue among foreign workers from Indonesia in Malaysia, with which it is expected they will take a prompt action to improve their English and intercultural competence. After a series of preparation bridged by the LSM sharing and Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia, a hybrid socialization webinar was conducted for this purpose in October 2023. Twenty-five Indonesian workers in Malaysia gathered in the Embassy in the capital to join the training via the large screen set in the hall. They seemed to show significant enthusiasm. Demonstrating interest, few of them asked questions. With guidance of the officials standing by, some shared positive feedback over the webinar material via the staff who, in turn, passed them on to all online participants. The webinar was also attended by other university based resource persons and participants. Overall, the community service is of great success. The only constraint faced is that there was no direct communication between the speaker and the participating migrant workers. Shooting equipment availability is required for future services accessed through similar mode (hybrid).

Keywords: *english language; culture; Indonesian; migrant labourers; success*

1. INTRODUCTION

Financially, the existence of migrant labourers overseas provides a mutual benefit of all parties. Foreign workers from Indonesia dream of getting a job in other countries to gain a better income for their families' better life. To the Indonesian Government, sending migrant workers to other countries contributes large foreign exchange. Meanwhile, in the countries of destination, the labour market demand is fulfilled, as in some countries, the citizens have no interest in particular types of jobs or, otherwise, the people required are not available and these, therefore, become vacancies for foreign workers, primarily from developing countries, including Indonesia. In fact,

however, Indonesian migrant workers are often faced with problems abroad, such as violence, unpaid wages, forced labour or exploitation, frustration, depression, illness, and human trafficking. It is reported that some issues are associated with (severe) lack of skills and competencies, including poor language mastery (Refugee and Workers Cultural Association, 2022) and intercultural competence.

Actually, when there is a will there surely is a way. Training on preparation for Indonesian migrant labourers before delivery until returning is often offered and conducted not only by the government institutions, but also by private agencies and academics (Sari dkk. 2020). It is also true that to get training on language required at the workplace such as English or other international languages is not always identical to lots of money. Institutions and individuals often offer such training. If offline training remains hardly possible, then it can be executed online. As long as it is implemented measurably, online training is equally good as offline one (Nernere et al., 2023). The question is whether the migrant workers have willingness or not.

Studies have mentioned that proficiency of the language commonly used at the workplace of migrant workers contributes greatly to success in having a job in other countries (Fahrudin, 2011). Nevertheless, many of those Indonesians wanting to work beyond the country neglect this and get into trouble abroad. How language proficiency and its maintenance play a role in this sector is no wonder. Language is a medium of communication and interaction with others (colleagues, employers, coworkers, partners). When communication runs well, business is enhanced. Unless workers are proficient in the language used in the workplace, they will be unable to compete with workers from diverse cultural backgrounds and nationalities.

The language proficiency and skill, and intercultural competence of migrant workers can be developed through such simple activities as gathering during vacations (Sulistiyowati, 2019). This sort of activity is a very positive form of adaptation to a new environment. Migrant workers from Indonesia who are outside the Archipelago, wherever they are on the globe, including Malaysia, if they look forward to having a better future while working away from home need to have such endeavors.

Based on the aforementioned arguments, Indonesian migrant workers equipped with language proficiency and intercultural competency are more well prepared and, therefore, their opportunity for better jobs and success in the workplace is more widely open. In addition, with that skill and competence, they are less likely to be in trouble when away from home. It is for this reason this community empowerment activity was dedicated.

2. METHOD

In response to a report by Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia in Malaysia that legal cases involving Indonesian workers away from home increasingly arise, it is a challenge for university based experts to lend a hand for a solution. This community service was addressed to provide assistance to Indonesian workers in Malaysia in dealing with legal cases facing them abroad attributed to lack of skills and competencies by giving them a socialization webinar on the English language and intercultural competence. This seminar was expected to enable them to raise awareness of English language, intercultural competence, and its contribution to community empowerment for success in working in the country of destination.

Co-working with the LSM Sharing (Indonesian Academic Community, based in Universitas Malikussaleh in Aceh Province, Indonesia) and a partner institution (Embassy of the Republic of Indonesia) in Malaysia, a hybrid socialization webinar was conducted in the month of October, 2023. By this hybrid webinar, it was performed online utilizing Zoom platform and the audience attended it in the Embassy in the capital of Malaysia. The participating Indonesian foreign workers gathered in the Embassy and were seated in the hall watching on the large screen displaying the speaker/resource person and other university based resource persons and participants joining it online. It took around 60 minutes, including a question-and-answer session.

To evaluate the implementation of the community service, the webinar was recorded and replayed to assess its process and impact on the target community's performance. In more detail, the process along with its impact was monitored through their attitudes, behaviour, response during the webinar.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section of the paper presents the results and discussion of the community service activity. Early from the preparation stage the activity ran smoothly. The communication between the resource person and the community service partner in Malaysia bridged by the LSM Sharing based in Aceh Province, Indonesia ran smoothly. It started with an offer from the LSM Sharing to conduct a collaborative community service aimed at empowering Indonesian migrant labourers in Malaysia. The offer then received a positive response. Registration and confirmation was made and it did not take long that the event agenda (and later a rundown) was shared.

That morning, the invited Indonesian migrant workers reached the site, the Embassy's building in the capital. They were gathered in the hall (see Figure 1). Two support staff stood by during the session, which was conducted via hybrid (where a speaker is not present before the audience/participants at the same place). By this, the Indonesian migrant workers who were

gathered in the hall watched on the large screen. There were twenty-five of them. Prior to the socialization, they were given a briefing.



Figure 1. Target participants joining a hybrid socialization seminar

Via Zoom, the event was also attended virtually by other university based resource persons and participants. All the participants, either those joining it via hybrid mode or online, followed the activity enthusiastically. As they seemed to demonstrate significant interest, a few of them addressed questions.



Figure 2. A migrant worker participant asked a question

Expressions of praise were addressed to the resource person in relation to the material given. As they missed a direct communication when delivering the message, they expressed the messages via the staff and, in turn, the staff passed them on to all online participants.

As the scenario is that the event began with a videoed presentation playing followed with a Q&A session for time efficiency, it was a pity that the video sound was hardly heard to online participants. Nevertheless, it was not an issue at all to the target participants, migrant workers, in the

Embassy's building hall. The true problem indeed deals with communication/interactions, where there is no direct convenient interaction especially between the target participants and the resource person.

Overall, the community service is a great success. Both in terms of quantity and quality, this activity intended for community empowerment met or supported the objective. Regarding the video issue, it actually was not an issue at all for the target participants. However, with respect to online participants it should be anticipated for a regular presentation in case the videoed version does not work as expected. Last, related to no direct communication or interaction between the resource person and target participants, as a major problem, professional shooting equipment should be made available for future services accessed through hybrid. By doing so, the target participants in the hall are covered on Zoom and direct communication/interaction with the resource person and vice versa was made possible.

4. CONCLUSION

Migrant workers invited to attend the socialization experienced legal cases that were said to be attributed, to some extent, to poor awareness of the English language mastery and intercultural competence. Looking thoroughly into their response during the socialization, this community empowerment activity can be considered to be of great success. Paramount concern and its suggestion as highlighted earlier should obtain a positive response from the Embassy in Malaysia as event partner. Also, for its optimum impact, the socialization should be followed up with offline and or online training on practical use of English.

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CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

We, the authors, declare that regarding this paper there is no conflict of interest at all.

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