

Basic Conversation for Working Abroad Among Indonesian Migrant Workers

Ida Ayu Putri Gita Ardiantari¹, Alva Nurvina Sularso², Putri Dzakiyyah², Afriza Jayanti²,
Yulianti Keke³, Siti Mudawanah⁴, Fakhrurrazi⁵

¹Prodi Sastra Jepang/Fakultas Bahasa Asing/Universitas Mahasaraswati Denpasar, Bali
Jalan Kamboja No. 11A, Denpasar ,Bali, 80223- Indonesia

²Telkom University, Jawa Barat - Indonesia

³Institut Transportasi dan Logistik Trisakti i, Kota Jakarta - Indonesia

⁴Universitas La Tansa Mashiro, Banten- Indonesia

⁵Institut Agama Islam Negeri Langsa, Aceh- Indonesia

E-mail: idaayupugitaa@unmas.ac.id

Article history:

Received: October 2023

Revised: October 2023

Accepted: October 2023

ABSTRACT A collaborative initiative between the Indonesian Embassy, SHARING, PPI UPSI, and partner universities, aimed to empower Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Kuala Lumpur. Over one semester, a hybrid seminar series was conducted, integrating online modules and offline workshops. One of the program focused on enhancing language proficiency, building confidence, and deepening cultural understanding to address the unique challenges faced by PMI. The results revealed a significant improvement in language skills among participants, as evidenced by pre and post-assessments. Key elements of success included a tailored curriculum informed by a thorough needs assessment, collaborative partnerships, and continuous support mechanisms through online forums. The hybrid format ensured accessibility and engagement, considering the diverse needs of PMI. This initiative serves as a model for future community service programs targeting migrant communities. The holistic approach, combining linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions, underscores the importance of comprehensive interventions. The positive outcomes highlight the potential for tailored language programs to contribute significantly to the empowerment and successful integration of migrant workers.

Keywords: *Indonesian Migrant Workers; Language Proficiency; Social Integration; Community Service; Cultural Understanding.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In the globalized landscape of the 21st century, the phenomenon of labor migration has become an integral aspect of economic dynamics, providing both opportunities and challenges. For Indonesia, the migration of its workforce, often referred to as Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), has been a prevailing trend, particularly towards neighbouring countries such as Malaysia. This migration, while promising economic prospects, has brought forth a myriad of issues that demand nuanced and comprehensive solutions.

The decision to seek employment abroad is often driven by the pursuit of better economic prospects, improved livelihoods, and the aspiration to support families back home. Malaysia, with its thriving economy, has become a destination for many Indonesian workers seeking employment opportunities across various sectors. However, beneath the surface of economic promise lies a complex tapestry of challenges faced by these migrant workers.

One of the prominent challenges encountered by PMI in their host country is the barrier of language. A considerable number of Indonesian migrant workers find themselves in situations where effective communication, especially in the local language, is paramount for both personal and professional interactions. The Malaysian workplace, like any other, demands a certain level of linguistic proficiency to navigate through daily tasks, understand safety protocols, and foster positive relationships with colleagues and employers.

Accordingly, the language barrier is not merely a linguistic challenge, it is a significant impediment that hinders the ability of PMI to fully integrate into the social fabric of their host society. Limited proficiency in the local language often results in isolation, making it difficult for migrant workers to access essential services, assert their rights, and engage meaningfully in community life. Furthermore, it leaves them vulnerable to exploitation, discrimination, and a range of issues that affect their overall well-being.

Studies have consistently highlighted the adverse effects of language barriers on migrant workers worldwide. The inability to communicate effectively can lead to misunderstandings, misinterpretations, and a sense of alienation, all of which contribute to the marginalization of PMI in their adopted communities (Chew & Leow, 2018; Gupta & Ferguson, 1992).

Therefor recognizing the multifaceted challenges posed by language barriers, there is an urgent need to address this issue systematically. The program, "Basic Conversation for Working Abroad," emerges as a proactive response to equip PMI with essential language skills. These skills extend beyond the rudiments of vocabulary and grammar; they encompass practical conversational abilities tailored to the specific contexts encountered by migrant workers in their daily lives and workplaces.

The importance of such a program is underscored by the notion that language proficiency is a gateway to broader social integration. Basic conversational skills not only facilitate smoother communication in the workplace but also enable PMI to navigate essential aspects of daily life, from seeking assistance at local establishments to engaging in casual conversations with neighbors.

In addressing the multifaceted nature of the language barrier, the hybrid seminar series conducted over one semester (October-December 2023) in the Aula Hasanuddin of KBRI Kuala Lumpur represents a concerted effort. This initiative, a collaboration between the non-governmental organization SHARING, the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, the Indonesian Students Association at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (PPI UPSI) Malaysia, and numerous universities across Indonesia and Malaysia, seeks to empower PMI with the linguistic tools necessary for successful social integration.

As we delve further into this article, we will explore the methodology employed in the seminar series, analyse the results obtained, discuss their implications, draw conclusions, and provide recommendations for future endeavors. The overarching goal is to shed light on the significance of imparting basic conversation skills to PMI as a means to enhance their overall well-being in the host country..

2. METHOD

The methodology employed in the community service program "Basic Conversation for Working Abroad" was designed to be comprehensive, participatory, and responsive to the unique needs of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Kuala Lumpur. The program, conducted over one semester (October-December 2023) as a hybrid seminar series, incorporated a mix of online and offline elements to ensure accessibility and engagement.

2.1 Needs Assessment:

Prior to the commencement of the program, a thorough needs assessment was conducted to identify the specific linguistic challenges faced by PMI in their daily lives and workplaces. This involved surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions with PMI, community leaders, and relevant stakeholders. The findings from this needs assessment served as the foundation for structuring the content of the Basic Conversation program, ensuring its relevance and effectiveness.

2.2 Curriculum Development:

Based on the needs assessment, a tailored curriculum was developed to address the identified language gaps. The curriculum focused on practical conversational skills in Malay, the predominant language in Kuala Lumpur. It included modules on workplace communication, daily life interactions, and cultural nuances to provide a holistic understanding of the linguistic requirements for effective integration. Literature from language acquisition studies, cultural studies, and migrant worker integration was consulted to inform the curriculum development process (Gudykunst, 2005; Hofstede, 2001; Fujieda, 2006). The aim was to ensure that the program not only addressed immediate language needs but also fostered cultural understanding and social adaptation.

2.3 Hybrid Seminar Series:

The seminar series was structured to accommodate the diverse learning needs of PMI and to overcome potential barriers, such as accessibility and scheduling conflicts. The hybrid format included both online and offline components. Interactive online modules were created, accessible through a dedicated platform. These modules covered foundational language skills, interactive exercises, and multimedia resources to enhance engagement. Online forums were established to facilitate peer-to-peer interaction and provide additional support. While physical workshops were

conducted at the Aula Hasanuddin of KBRI Kuala Lumpur. These workshops focused on practical application, role-playing scenarios, and personalized feedback. Experts in language education, cultural studies, and migration issues were invited as guest speakers to enrich the learning experience.

2.4 Collaborative Partnerships:

The success of the program was contingent on collaborative partnerships with various stakeholders. LSM SHARING collaborated with the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, the Indonesian Students Association at Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (PPI UPSI) Malaysia, and 115 universities in Indonesia and Malaysia. These partnerships facilitated resource sharing, access to expertise, and a broad reach to the target audience.

2.5 Monitoring and Evaluation:

A robust monitoring and evaluation framework was implemented to assess the program's impact continually. Pre and post-program assessments measured participants' language proficiency, confidence levels, and cultural understanding. Feedback sessions, both online and offline, were conducted to gather qualitative insights and identify areas for improvement.

2.6 Continuous Support and Feedback Loop:

Recognizing the dynamic nature of language acquisition and social integration, the program incorporated a continuous support mechanism. Online forums and helplines were established to provide ongoing assistance and foster a sense of community among PMI participants. Regular feedback loops were established to capture evolving needs and inform future iterations of the program.

In the subsequent sections, we will delve into the results of the program, analyze its implications, draw conclusions, and provide recommendations for future initiatives aimed at empowering Indonesian migrant workers in their host communities.

2. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The program "Basic Conversation for Working Abroad" yielded promising results, evidenced by both quantitative and qualitative data. Pre and post-program assessments indicated a significant improvement in participants' language proficiency, confidence levels, and cultural understanding.

A notable increase in participants' confidence levels was observed, particularly in real-life communication situations. The interactive nature of both online modules and offline workshops contributed to a supportive learning environment, aligning with findings from self-efficacy research (Bandura, 1997).

The program facilitated a deeper understanding of Malaysian culture and societal norms. This was evidenced by participants' ability to navigate cultural nuances in both personal and professional interactions. The incorporation of cultural studies in the curriculum resonated with research emphasizing the importance of cultural competence in migrant integration (Bhugra, 2005; Tam & Milfont, 2020).

The positive outcomes of the program underscore its effectiveness in addressing the multifaceted challenges faced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Kuala Lumpur. The following key points emerge from the results and merit further discussion:

Empowerment through Language: The improvement in language proficiency directly correlates with enhanced empowerment for PMI. The ability to articulate needs, understand instructions, and engage in conversations fosters a sense of agency and reduces dependency (Roura, 2017). The program's emphasis on practical conversational skills aligns with research emphasizing the importance of task-based language teaching in real-world contexts (Bhandari, 2020).

Social Integration and Well-being: The observed increase in confidence levels and cultural understanding signifies a positive step towards improved social integration. Social integration is intrinsically linked to the well-being of migrant workers, impacting mental health, job satisfaction, and overall quality of life (Ho et al., 2021). The program's holistic approach, addressing linguistic, cultural, and social aspects, aligns with recommendations for comprehensive interventions in migrant communities (Cologna, 2007).

Collaborative Learning and Community Building: The hybrid seminar series, incorporating both online and offline components, fostered a sense of community among participants. Collaborative learning experiences, including role-playing and group activities, facilitated peer support and the exchange of experiences (Mitchell, 2023). This community-building aspect aligns with research highlighting the significance of social networks in migrant adaptation (Portes, 1998).

Continuous Support Mechanism: The establishment of online forums and helplines as part of the continuous support mechanism proved instrumental in maintaining post-program engagement. Ongoing support is crucial for sustaining the gains made during the program and addressing evolving needs (Norris & Ortega, 2000).

The empowering effects of language acquisition for PMI extend far beyond the realm of effective communication. Proficiency in the host country's language enhances agency, enabling PMI to articulate their needs, assert their rights, and actively participate in the social fabric of their adopted community. This empowerment is particularly crucial for mitigating vulnerabilities and reducing the risk of exploitation often faced by migrant workers (Roura, 2017). The program's holistic approach, combining linguistic, cultural, and social dimensions, aligns with the notion that

true empowerment involves equipping individuals with the tools to navigate diverse aspects of their lives (Cologna, 2007).



Figure 1. Flyer of Community Service Activities

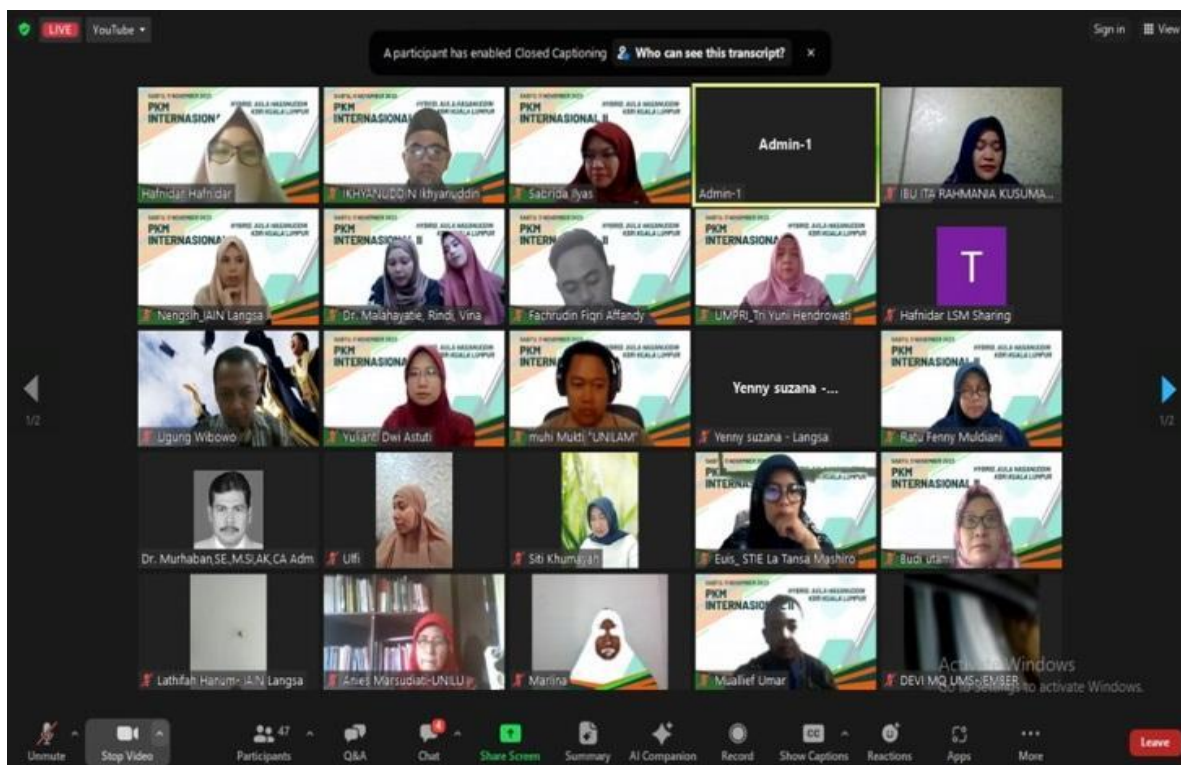


Figure 2. Community Service Activities

CONCLUSION

The "Basic Conversation for Working Abroad" program, designed to address language barriers among Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Kuala Lumpur, has yielded substantial results, reflecting its efficacy in enhancing language proficiency, fostering confidence, and deepening cultural understanding. The findings underscore the broader implications for the empowerment and social integration of PMI, aligning with existing literature on migrant adaptation, language acquisition, and community building.

The results of the program revealed a commendable improvement in the language proficiency of participants. Through a tailored curriculum emphasizing practical conversational skills in Malay, participants demonstrated enhanced abilities to navigate daily life interactions and workplace scenarios. Concurrently, the program contributed to heightened confidence levels, allowing PMI to engage more assertively in their new environment. Additionally, a deepened cultural understanding emerged as a pivotal outcome, fostering a nuanced awareness of Malaysian societal norms.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

We extend our sincere thanks to the Indonesian Embassy, LSM SHARING, PPI UPSI, partner universities, participants, and contributors for their invaluable support in empowering Indonesian Migrant Workers through the "Basic Conversation for Working Abroad" program. Your dedication has made a meaningful impact.

REFERENCES

- HO, K. H. M., Wilson, I. M., Wong, J. Y., McKenna, L., Reisenhofer, S., Efendi, F., & Smith, G. D. (2021). Health stressors, problems and coping strategies of migrant domestic workers: A scoping review.
- Bandura, A. (1997). Self-efficacy: The exercise of control. W.H. Freeman and Company.
- Bhugra, D. (2005). Cultural identities and cultural congruency: A new model for evaluating mental distress in immigrants. *Acta Psychiatrica Scandinavica*, 111(2), 84-93.
- Brown, H. D. (2007). Principles of language learning and teaching. Pearson Education.
- Cologna, D. (2007). Chinese immigrant entrepreneurs in Italy: Strengths and weaknesses of an ethnic enclave economy. In *Asian Migrants and European Labour Markets* (pp. 282-304). Routledge.
- Gudykunst, W. B. (2005). Theorizing about intercultural communication. SAGE Publications.
- Hofstede, G. (2001). Culture's consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. SAGE Publications.
- International Organization for Migration. (2019). World Migration Report 2020. IOM.

- Norris, J. M., & Ortega, L. (2000). Effectiveness of L2 instruction: A research synthesis and quantitative meta-analysis. *Language Learning*, 50(3), 417-528.
- Portes, A. (1998). Social capital: Its origins and applications in modern sociology. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24(1), 1-24.
- Richards, J. C., & Rodgers, T. S. (2014). *Approaches and methods in language teaching*. Cambridge university press.
- Fujieda, Y. (2006). A brief historical sketch of second language writing studies: A retrospective. *Kyoai Gakuen Maebashi Kokusai Daigaku Ronssyuu*, 6, 59-72.
- Roura, M. (2017). Unravelling migrants' health paradoxes: a transdisciplinary research agenda. *J Epidemiol Community Health*.
- Mitchell, P. (2021). *Acquiring a conception of mind: A review of psychological research and theory*. Psychology Press.
- Tam, K. P., & Milfont, T. L. (2020). Towards cross-cultural environmental psychology: A state-of-the-art review and recommendations. *Journal of Environmental Psychology*, 71, 101474.
- Bhandari, L. P. (2020). Task-based language teaching: A current EFL approach. *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 11(1), 1-5.
- Liu, Q., & Pan, H. (2020). Investigation on life satisfaction of rural-to-urban migrant workers in China: A moderated mediation model. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(7), 2454.