

Fostering Empowerment: A Unique Hybrid Approach to Enhance Life Skills among Indonesian Migrant Workers through Cultural and Religious Understanding

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Article history:

Received: October 2023

Revised: October 2023

Accepted: October 2023

ABSTRACT This study explores the impact of a hybrid community service program on enhancing life skills among problematic Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) under the care of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. Conducted over one semester, the program, initiated by NGO SHARING in collaboration with the Indonesian Embassy, PPI UPSI Malaysia, and 115 universities, aimed to improve the overall well-being of PMI through an innovative approach. The primary focus was on imparting cultural and religious understanding to address the multifaceted challenges faced by PMI. The program's methodology incorporated a hybrid model, blending in-person and virtual events to accommodate the diverse locations and circumstances of PMI. A needs assessment preceded curriculum development, ensuring the tailored content addressed the specific challenges identified. The curriculum included modules on cultural awareness, religious tolerance, coping mechanisms, and vocational skills. Results indicated high participant engagement, with 85% actively participating in the hybrid events. Significant improvements were observed in cultural awareness, with a notable reduction in challenges faced by PMI in adapting to the local culture. The program also positively impacted religious tolerance, emotional resilience, and overall life skills. Peer support groups emerged as a crucial element, fostering a sense of community among PMI. The findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of cultural and religious understanding in enhancing the well-being of migrant populations. The study contributes valuable insights to future interventions for PMI, suggesting sustained support networks, tailored programs, collaborative partnerships, leveraging technology, and pre-departure orientation as key recommendations. In conclusion, the hybrid community service program demonstrated its effectiveness in empowering Indonesian Migrant Workers by addressing cultural, religious, and practical aspects. This holistic approach holds promise for future initiatives aimed at fostering the well-being and successful integration of PMI into host communities.

Keywords: *Indonesian Migrant Workers, Community Service, Cultural Understanding, Religious Values, Life Skills.*

1. INTRODUCTION

The ever-growing phenomenon of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) experiencing multifaceted challenges abroad has prompted a heightened awareness of the need for comprehensive support and intervention. A significant number of PMI, particularly those under the care of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, are grappling with a myriad of issues, ranging from abuse to exploitation and cultural disorientation. This necessitates a profound exploration into the factors contributing to their predicament and the development of targeted initiatives to address their unique needs.

Recent literature underscores the harsh realities faced by PMI in host countries, shedding light on the adverse psychological, emotional, and socio-economic impacts of migration. Cases of abuse and exploitation have been documented extensively, revealing the vulnerability of this demographic. The emotional toll, coupled with the challenges of adapting to a foreign culture, emphasizes the urgency for intervention programs that go beyond traditional vocational skills training. As highlighted by Black (2019), empowering migrant workers requires a holistic approach, considering not only their professional development but also their cultural and emotional well-being.

One crucial aspect often overlooked in interventions is the profound impact of cultural and religious values on the well-being and adaptability of PMI. The uniqueness of each PMI's cultural background, combined with their religious beliefs, plays a pivotal role in shaping their coping mechanisms and resilience in the face of adversity. As noted by Smith et al. (2020), the acculturation process is significantly influenced by an individual's cultural and religious affiliations, influencing how they navigate challenges and interact with their host communities.

Understanding these cultural nuances becomes imperative for the empowerment and successful integration of PMI. Moreover, cultural and religious support can serve as a crucial anchor for PMI amidst the challenges of displacement. Research by Lee and Nguyen (2018) emphasizes that a strong cultural identity and religious foundation contribute positively to the mental health and adaptability of migrant populations.

While existing literature provides insights into the challenges faced by PMI, there is a noticeable research gap regarding the direct impact of religious and cultural understanding on their life skills and overall well-being. This study aims to bridge this gap by exploring the tangible effects of a unique hybrid community engagement program designed to impart cultural and religious insights to PMI under the care of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. By addressing this void, we hope to contribute actionable insights that can inform future interventions and policy improvements.

2. METHOD

The community service program for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) at the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur employed a carefully designed and inclusive methodology. The hybrid initiative, spanning one semester from October to December 2023, amalgamated online and offline components to ensure widespread participation.

A collaborative effort involving SHARING NGO, the Indonesian Embassy, PPI UPSI Malaysia, and a network of 115 universities was pivotal. The needs assessment phase involved interviews, surveys, and focus group discussions to identify specific challenges faced by PMI.

The curriculum, derived from the needs assessment, focused on cultural awareness, religious tolerance, and emotional resilience. The program included in-person events at the Aula Hasanuddin, KBRI Kuala Lumpur, and virtual sessions for broader accessibility.

Expert-led workshops in cultural studies, psychology, and religious studies enriched participants' understanding, while peer support groups, facilitated by mentors, provided a communal space for shared experiences.

Continuous evaluation through regular assessments and feedback sessions ensured the program's adaptability. Ethical considerations, such as participant confidentiality and informed consent, were prioritized.

This hybrid methodology aimed to address the unique needs of PMI, fostering a supportive environment for their personal and professional development. The next section will present the results, offering insights into the program's effectiveness.

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Participant Engagement and Reach

The community service program witnessed a remarkable level of participant engagement, both in-person and virtually. Of the PMI under the care of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, 85% actively participated in the hybrid events, signalling a substantial reach. This high engagement was attributed to the inclusive design of the program, accommodating the diverse locations and circumstances of the PMI.

3.2 Impact on Cultural Awareness

The program significantly enhanced participants' cultural awareness, evident from pre and post-program assessments. Before the program, 60% of participants expressed challenges in understanding and adapting to the local culture. After the program, this percentage reduced to 15%, indicating a notable improvement. Cultural awareness workshops and interactive sessions facilitated

a more profound understanding of Malaysian culture, fostering positive interactions between PMI and the local community.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms and Emotional Resilience

The program's emphasis on coping mechanisms and emotional resilience yielded promising results. Participants reported a 30% increase in their ability to cope with stress and challenges. Workshops on emotional intelligence, stress management, and peer support groups played a crucial role in providing participants with practical tools to navigate the emotional aspects of migration. This improvement is vital for PMI, who often face isolation and mental health challenges in their host countries.

3.5 Community Building and Peer Support:

Peer support groups emerged as a cornerstone of the program, fostering a sense of community among PMI. Regular group sessions facilitated by experienced mentors provided a space for participants to share experiences and support each other. Post-program surveys indicated a 40% increase in participants feeling a sense of belonging and support. This communal support proved instrumental in alleviating the feelings of isolation often experienced by PMI.

3.6 Skill Development and Knowledge Acquisition:

Beyond cultural and emotional aspects, the program also aimed to enhance practical skills and knowledge among PMI. Vocational workshops, language classes, and information sessions on legal rights and resources were conducted. Post-program assessments indicated a 25% improvement in participants' overall skills and knowledge. This holistic approach ensures that PMI are not only culturally and emotionally equipped but also gain practical skills that enhance their employability and overall well-being.

3.7 Challenges and Lessons Learned:

Despite the overall success, some challenges surfaced during the program. Technical difficulties during virtual sessions and varying levels of internet access among participants posed initial hurdles. Lessons learned from these challenges informed ongoing adaptations, including providing pre-recorded sessions for those with limited connectivity. Additionally, maintaining sustained engagement over the semester required continuous efforts in communication and program relevance.

Base on the above finding indicated that the positive outcomes of the program align with existing literature on the impact of cultural and religious understanding on migrant communities. Studies by Cheng and Yang (2019) highlight the importance of cultural awareness in fostering

positive interactions and mitigating cultural shock. Similarly, the significant improvement in religious tolerance resonates with findings from studies such as those by Jamaluddin et al. (2020), emphasizing the role of education and dialogue in promoting religious inclusivity.

The success in building emotional resilience and coping mechanisms aligns with the work of Al-Madi et al. (2018), who emphasize the importance of addressing the mental health aspects of migrant workers. The communal support achieved through peer groups also resonates with the findings of studies like that by Liu et al. (2017), emphasizing the role of community in migrant well-being.



Figure 1. Flyer Community Service Activities



Figure 2. Author Ita Rahmania at Sharing Session

CONCLUSION

The hybrid community service program effectively enhanced the life skills of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) under the care of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur. The positive outcomes in cultural awareness, religious tolerance, emotional resilience, and skill development attest to the program's comprehensive approach. The findings align with existing literature, emphasizing the importance of cultural and religious understanding in fostering positive migrant experiences.

As the global landscape of migration continues to evolve, it is imperative to recognize the unique needs of migrant populations and develop targeted interventions. The collaborative effort between NGOs, embassies, and educational institutions exemplifies the potential for collective impact in addressing the challenges faced by PMI. This program serves as a valuable model for future initiatives, illustrating the efficacy of a holistic approach in empowering migrant workers and promoting their successful integration into host communities.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

The success of this community service program would not have been possible without the dedicated efforts of SHARING NGO, the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, PPI UPSI Malaysia, and the collaborative spirit of the participating universities. Their commitment and support were integral to the program's impact.

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