



EMPOWERING WORKPLACE COMMUNICATION: COLLABORATIVE STRATEGIES FOR A PRODUCTIVE AND HARMONIOUS WORK ENVIRONMENT AMONG INDONESIAN MUSLIM MIGRANT WORKERS IN MALAYSIA

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ABSTRAK

Program pengabdian masyarakat ini bertujuan untuk meningkatkan pemahaman pekerja migran Indonesia mengenai komunikasi di tempat kerja serta perannya dalam mendorong kolaborasi dan produktivitas di lingkungan kerja multikultural di Malaysia. Program ini dilaksanakan di Malaysia dan secara khusus menyasar pekerja migran Indonesia dari berbagai sektor. Sebanyak 30 peserta mengikuti program ini; semuanya adalah WNI yang bekerja di berbagai bidang profesional. Program ini bertujuan memperdalam pemahaman peserta tentang komunikasi di tempat kerja serta relevansinya dalam mendukung kolaborasi dan produktivitas. Dengan menggunakan pendekatan pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman, pelatihan ini memadukan teori komunikasi dasar dengan diskusi berbasis kasus tentang hambatan komunikasi di tempat kerja. Metode interaktif ini memfasilitasi perumusan solusi yang mempertimbangkan aspek budaya dan bahasa, sebagaimana tercermin dari tanggapan positif terhadap penerapannya secara praktis di lingkungan kerja Malaysia. Program ini tidak hanya meningkatkan kesadaran peserta akan pentingnya komunikasi yang efektif, tetapi juga membekali mereka dengan perangkat praktis yang dapat diterapkan di tempat kerja masing-masing. Program ini berhasil menumbuhkan kesadaran akan pentingnya keterampilan komunikasi di lingkungan kerja yang multikultural. Sebagai tindak lanjut, disarankan untuk mengembangkan lokakarya komunikasi berkala dan modul digital yang dirancang khusus untuk pekerja migran. Kolaborasi dengan pemberi kerja dan organisasi pendukung setempat dapat memperluas jangkauan serta dampak dari inisiatif semacam ini, yang pada akhirnya mendukung terciptanya lingkungan kerja yang lebih inklusif dan harmonis.

ABSTRACT

This community engagement program aimed to enhance Indonesian migrant workers' understanding of workplace communication and its role in fostering collaboration and productivity within Malaysia's multicultural work environments. This community engagement program was conducted in Malaysia and specifically targeted Indonesian migrant workers across various employment sectors. A total of 30 participants attended the program, all of whom are Indonesian nationals working in different professional fields. The program aimed to enhance participants' understanding of workplace communication and its relevance in promoting collaboration and productivity. Utilizing an experiential learning approach, the training integrated basic communication theory with case-based discussions on workplace barriers. This interactive method facilitated the identification of cultural-linguistic solutions, evidenced by positive participant feedback regarding its practical application in the Malaysian work environment. The program not only increased their awareness of effective communication but also provided practical tools to apply in their workplaces. The program successfully raised awareness about the importance of communication skills in multicultural work settings. As a follow-up, it is recommended to develop periodic communication workshops and digital modules tailored to migrant workers. Collaboration with employers and local support organizations could broaden the reach and impact of such initiatives, ultimately supporting a more inclusive and harmonious work environment.

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INTRODUCTION

Globalization has driven an increase in cross-border labor mobility, particularly in the Southeast Asian region (Hermana et al., 2024). Malaysia is one of the main destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers due to its geographical proximity, high labor market demand, and cultural and linguistic similarities (Rachmat, 2024; Pratama et al., 2020). According to data from the Department of Statistics Malaysia and a report by Channel News Asia, in 2022 there were more than 2.1–2.2 million registered migrant workers in Malaysia, with approximately 582,108 of them coming from Indonesia making Indonesian migrant workers one of the largest groups among all migrant workers in the country. (Bedi, 2025). They are spread across various sectors, including manufacturing, construction, plantations, services, and the domestic sector.

Although the contribution of migrant workers to Malaysia's economy is highly significant (Suranto et al., 2024), Indonesian migrant workers face various social and structural challenges in the workplace (Yulianti et al., 2024). One of the most critical challenges is the issue of communication. (Hamdi, 2021). In a multicultural work context, the ability to communicate effectively is not only related to language, but also involves an understanding of the norms, values, and cultural expectations that apply in the workplace. Communication barriers often lead to misunderstandings, interpersonal conflicts, job dissatisfaction, and even violations of labor rights (Mulia et al., 2024).

Various studies show that communication barriers and a lack of understanding of work procedures are the root causes of many problems faced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in

destination countries, including Malaysia. Djatmika et al (2024) found that the low level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) significantly affects the ability of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) to understand work instructions, workplace cultural norms, as well as their rights and obligations. The inability to communicate effectively with employers not only results in less harmonious working relationships, but can also lead to serious misunderstandings that escalate into conflict. Similar findings were revealed by Izzaty et al., (2024) which noted that most work-related conflicts experienced by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), including contract violations, unpaid wages, and unilateral termination, often stem from unclear communication and a lack of understanding of the terms of the employment agreement. This issue is further exacerbated by PMI's limited knowledge in formally expressing complaints or navigating official reporting channels, resulting in many cases being unresolved fairly. Preliminary findings indicated that PMI in Malaysia operate in high-pressure multicultural environments with minimal professional communication support. The existing situation was defined by frequent unresolved labor disputes and technical language barriers that masked deeper deficiencies in cross-cultural navigation. Without formal empowerment-based interventions, these communication failures directly compromised both worker safety and workplace productivity). Research by (Djatmika et al., 2024) states that migrant workers with stronger intercultural communication skills tend to adapt more easily, build positive working relationships, and resolve conflicts constructively. Unfortunately, the majority of Indonesian migrant workers are not provided with professional

communication training either before or during their employment abroad. (Aldini et al., 2023).

Recognizing that miscommunication stems from a deficit in cross-cultural and legal literacy, this intervention targeted Muslim PMI in Malaysia through a synergistic training model. The program integrated foundational communication concepts with participatory problem-solving clinics to address real-world workplace grievances. This approach aimed to elevate the workers' bargaining position and professional adaptation, ensuring that improved communication capacity leads directly to a more productive and legally secure work environment

METHODS

The implementation of this community service activity was technically divided into several stages. The first stage was the preparation phase, which began with coordination between the implementing team and the Indonesian migrant worker community partners in Malaysia. During this phase, a needs assessment was conducted through initial communication with community representatives and supporting organizations, while also arranging the activity schedule. In addition, the team prepared training materials relevant to the participants' needs, focusing on the fundamentals of workplace communication, effective and polite communication strategies in multicultural contexts, and ways to wisely address potential communication conflicts.

The second stage was the implementation phase, conducted in the form of a full-day face-to-face training. This activity was carried out through a presentation by the speaker, followed by a question-and-answer session and an open discussion with participants. During the session,

participants were given the opportunity to share their personal experiences related to communication challenges in the workplace and to ask questions directly related to their daily work situations. The activity was dialogical in nature, allowing participants to respond to the material while building understanding through the exchange of experiences among individuals.

The third stage was operational assistance during the training, in which the facilitator provided direct guidance and answered participants' questions using a communicative and contextual approach. This approach aimed to ensure that the training materials were practically understood by the participants and could be directly linked to real situations in their respective workplaces.

The final stage was the evaluation phase, which was conducted in a simple manner through direct observation by the implementation team of participant engagement and responses. No quantitative measurements such as pre-tests or post-tests were conducted. Instead, the success indicators of the activity were observed from the participants' enthusiasm during the event, such as activeness in asking questions, attentiveness in listening to the material, and openness in sharing personal experiences during the discussion session. Observations showed that the activity received a positive response from the participants, who stated that they gained new insights and felt helped by the material presented especially in facing communication dynamics in multicultural workplaces. Through this step-by-step and participatory approach, the community service program is expected to make a tangible contribution to improving the communication skills of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia,

as well as to build a foundation for more inclusive, open, and productive communication in cross-cultural work environments.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The community service activity was carried out on Sunday, May 18, 2025. This community service program was successfully implemented in accordance with the planned stages: preparation, implementation, mentoring, and evaluation. The results of the activity showed that the cross-cultural communication training provided to Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia had a positive impact on increasing participants' understanding of the importance of effective communication in a multicultural workplace.

The program began with an interactive and reflective session of material presentation. The community service provider (speaker) opened the session by explaining the basic concepts of cross-cultural communication, including its definition, scope, and urgency in the context of a workplace involving individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This session was delivered not only through one-way lectures but also combined with brainstorming techniques aimed at exploring the participants' initial understanding and experiences in dealing with cultural differences at work. Participants were introduced to various forms of verbal and non-verbal communication commonly encountered in multicultural work environments. Special emphasis was placed on non-verbal aspects of communication, such as facial expressions, eye contact, body gestures, tone of voice, and personal space elements that often, become sources of miscommunication if not properly understood. Participants were also given concrete examples of gesture differences between Indonesian culture and

workplace culture in Malaysia or other countries, so that they could be more aware and adaptive in their daily interactions.



Figure 1. Presentation of material



Figure 2. discussion with the audience

The implementation phase was divided into two primary stages: foundational knowledge transfer and collaborative problem-solving. As shown in Figure 1, the activity commenced with a presentation on effective communication strategies tailored for multicultural environments. This session focused on technical and psychological competencies, including assertive expression, active listening, and emotional regulation in professional settings. To bridge the gap between theory and practice, the speaker presented real-life scenarios specific to the domestic, manufacturing, and service sectors in Malaysia. Following the presentation, the program transitioned into an

interactive dialogue, as illustrated in Figure 2. During this session, participants were encouraged to reflect on their personal experiences and identify specific workplace conflicts. This participatory discussion allowed workers to cross-reference the newly learned strategies with their daily challenges, facilitating a contextual understanding of how to build empathy and resolve disputes constructively with coworkers from diverse cultural backgrounds.

One of the most engaging and impactful parts of the training was the open discussion session, where participants enthusiastically shared various real challenges they faced in communicating across cultures in the workplace. Some of the difficulties they mentioned included misunderstanding work instructions due to their employer's accent or speaking style, feeling awkward when interacting with coworkers from other countries because of different norms of politeness, and fear of expressing opinions or objections for fear of being perceived as rude or offensive. Additionally, participants conveyed their limited understanding of their labor rights and the formal reporting procedures when communication conflicts occur. This discussion provided a concrete picture of the complexity of communication challenges faced by Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. The community service provider (speaker) responded to each issue with a solution-oriented and contextual approach, offering relevant technical and ethical advice to help participants face those communication challenges more confidently and constructively in their respective workplaces.

The community service activity concluded with a joint reflection session, where participants were given the opportunity to share new insights

they had gained during the training and the communication strategies they intended to apply at work. This session was a crucial moment for consolidating participants' understanding and providing space for them to reflect on their personal experiences in relation to the material presented. Many participants stated that they now better understood the importance of body language in cross-cultural communication, how to ask questions appropriately without appearing confrontational or disrespectful, and how to avoid assumptions or biases when communicating with supervisors or coworkers from different cultural backgrounds.

In addition, the activity was evaluated qualitatively through direct observation of the participants' engagement and enthusiasm during the training. The community service provider (speaker) noted that participants showed a high level of involvement, as evidenced by their active questioning, attentiveness in listening to the material, and openness in sharing personal experiences. Some participants even spontaneously brought up sensitive issues that they had previously found difficult to express in formal forums, indicating that the activity successfully created a safe and empowering dialogue space.

The high level of participation and active involvement from the participants served as an indicator of the effectiveness of the participatory approach used in this training. It not only demonstrated the relevance of the material to the participants' needs but also reflected an increase in their internal motivation to develop more adaptive and productive communication skills in multicultural work environments. Thus, this activity not only provided new knowledge but also encouraged a transformation in attitude and

critical awareness, both of which are essential for migrant workers to face cross-cultural communication challenges with greater confidence and problem-solving capacity.

The cross-cultural communication training for Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia has shown high relevance to the structural issues faced by migrant workers in their daily work life. Communication barriers are not merely about language difficulties, but also involve an understanding of the norms, values, and cultural expectations that shape social interactions in the workplace. This is in line with the findings of (Djatkika et al., 2024) which emphasizes that the low level of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) is at the root of many work-related problems experienced by migrant workers, ranging from miscommunication and misunderstandings of work instructions to conflicts with legal consequences. This training positions cross-cultural communication not merely as a technical skill, but as a social competence that requires sensitivity, reflection, and adaptation. This supports the approach proposed by Fantini (2009), which states that ICC consists of three main components: cultural awareness, communication skills, and an open attitude toward differences. These three aspects served as the foundation for designing the training materials and were reflected in the participants' enthusiasm and engagement throughout the activity. In terms of approach, this activity adopted a participatory method that provided space for participants' experiences to serve as a source of collective learning. This is in line with the principles of experiential learning developed by (Kolb et al., 2014) which states that direct experience and critical reflection are the keys to meaningful

learning, especially in the context of adult education. The diverse work experiences of migrant workers serve as a rich source to be explored collectively, making the training materials feel relevant and contextual.

The active participation of the participants also indicates the presence of an empowerment process a process in which individuals become aware of their social position and begin to take control over their experiences and the solutions they need (Zimmerman, 2000). Participants who were initially passive began to bravely share personal experiences and ask reflective questions. This serves as an indicator that the training not only transferred information but also fostered critical awareness and self-confidence. In the context of migrant worker protection, this activity also supports preventive efforts against potential violations of workers' rights. Research by (Hamdi, 2021) showed that one of the causes of contract violations or unilateral termination of employment is closely related to miscommunication or the worker's lack of knowledge about procedures and their rights. Thus, improving cross-cultural communication competence has a broader impact. (Rizki, 2014) Not only in terms of interpersonal relationships, but also in legal protection and the overall improvement of migrant workers' well-being.

From a practical and applied perspective, this program may serve as a replicable training model for other migrant worker communities, provided that it is adapted to the specific cultural contexts and employment sectors of each target group. The integration of conceptual frameworks with applied communication practices relevant to real workplace conditions constitutes a key strength of the program. Moving forward, the

sustainability and broader impact of similar initiatives can be enhanced through strategic collaboration with migrant worker organizations, educational institutions, and governmental agencies, thereby ensuring the scalability and long-term effectiveness of such empowerment efforts.

CONCLUSION

The community service program focusing on cross-cultural communication training for Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia has been successfully implemented and has generated a significant positive impact. Through participatory and reflective approaches, the training participants not only gained conceptual understanding of the importance of effective communication in multicultural work environments but also developed practical skills to navigate everyday communication challenges. As such, the training functioned not merely as a medium for knowledge transfer but also as a space for empowerment, strengthening both the social position and communication capacities of Indonesian migrant workers abroad. Moving forward, this training model holds the potential to be replicated in other migrant worker communities, with appropriate adjustments to sectoral and cultural contexts. Its sustainability should be ensured through continuous mentoring programs and cross-sectoral institutional support.

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