



# An Eye-Opening Experiences: The Interplay of Indonesian Migrant Workers Being a Worker and Student in Taiwan

Friska Ria Sitorus<sup>1</sup>(✉), Wolter Parlindungan Silalahi<sup>2</sup>, Dhea Adela<sup>3</sup>,  
and Teofilus Ardian Hopeman<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Department of Education, Universitas Prima Indonesia, Medan, Indonesia  
friskariasitorus@unprimdn.ac.id

<sup>2</sup> Department of Cultural and Religious Tourism, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung,  
Tarutung, Indonesia

<sup>3</sup> Elementary Teacher Education, Nusa Putra University, Sukabumi, Indonesia  
dhea.adela@nusaputra.ac.id

<sup>4</sup> Department of Education and Human Potentials Development,  
National Dong Hwa University, Hualien, Taiwan  
610688119@gms.ndhu.edu.tw

**Abstract.** This qualitative study aimed to identify and examine the Indonesian migrant workers' experiences at an Indonesian government's community learning center in Taiwan. Most Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan are junior high school dropout students from the countryside who decided to be workers to obtain a better life quality and economy. They strived to get a high wage for unskill jobs in Taiwan compared to Indonesia. Fortunately, they still had the opportunity to pursue their education at the senior high school level as a second chance. The study identified two Indonesian female migrant workers who were interviewed through an in-depth interview. Then, the data from the interviewed section were transcribed and analyzed qualitatively. This study revealed two challenges while undergoing these statuses: time and financial management. On the other hand, studying at an Indonesian government's community learning contributed to the positive impacts of being Indonesian migrant workers, such as improving self-value, becoming agents of change in their future, and becoming more critical in conveying ideas and decisions.

**Keywords:** Indonesian Migrant Workers · Community Learning Center · Qualitative Research

## 1 Introduction

The Indonesians decided to be migrant workers because of limited employment or the economic pressures in their home country. They expect to change their life quality from developed countries that offer higher wages [1]. The Indonesian migrant workers mostly occupy the job placement as household servants, such as caring for the sick, elderly,

disabled, toddler, and the like at the employers' homes with a load of irregular work-time configurations every day [2]. They work all day long at the employer's house, and they have less time to take days off because all the work is delegated to them, which will be risky if they break the rules [3]. It is estimated that sixty-five percent of Indonesian overseas workers graduated from elementary and junior high school, mostly comprised of unskill workers. It is the main reason why the Indonesian government established a community learning center (CLC) in November 2013 through the Indonesian Economic and Trade Office in Taipei. Its purpose is to help Indonesian migrant workers complete compulsory education.

It challenged them to be full-time migrant workers and students simultaneously, so they had to wake up at 06.00 am every day and finish at 08.00 pm. Because of their big ambition for future life, they committed to joining the community learning center (CLC) that might take them to upgrade their future job level, expand their working quality, and gain confidence to socialize with the community and others. In addition, to join the CLC, they had to manage their time to work and study simultaneously. Referring to their signed contract, they had to meet the employers' needs for working 14 to 18 h each day without overtime [1]. Especially for the elderly, the caregiver had to be ready anytime if the elderly needed assistance for a whole night. Responding to this situation, they faced much effort to arrange their working time wisely to prepare themselves to join the online learning that started 9.00 pm until midnight three times a week. They had to be competent in setting their time to complete the daily activities such as doing all the work at the workplace, calling their children and relatives in Indonesia, joining online learning, and doing homework/

The teacher engaged a critical pedagogy in the learning activities. Pedagogy aims to provide knowledge, skills, and social relations to encourage students to involve themselves in the social order [4]. This pedagogy is critical in teaching students from oppressed backgrounds to make them more open-minded and understand their positions to break the limits. In addition, it is an appropriate approach to encourage them to have the realization to fight against human oppression in society. [5] proposed that critical pedagogy embodies three inseparable processes: how one teaches, what is being taught, and how one learns. Therefore, the students are encouraged to be active and creative to be involved in society by critical pedagogy and develop the students' personalities and awareness of their surroundings even though it is not easy to implement critical pedagogy in the learning activities.

The challenges in implementing critical pedagogy praxis in learning are the lack of student preparation, institutional constraints, and student resistance. The key to the successful implementation of critical pedagogy is the implementation of praxis in learning, where students are expected to understand better the goals (aim) and meaning (intent) of learning practices that give sense to criticism of students. Education aims to develop a more socially just world [5]. Furthermore, critical pedagogy helps students recognize their identity and make changes to themselves, giving new hopes for their future. In this case, the teacher is expected to be a person who is open (stay open) and active in responding to discussions with students who are expected to be more open and accessible in responding to learning. Therefore, the learning process is designed more toward conversation with a fully people-oriented approach. In conclusion, critical pedagogy

**Table 1.** Participants' demographic background

Name	Age	Home town in Indonesia	Working Place in Taiwan	Length of work	Job
MW1	25 y.o	West Java	Yunlin	7 years	Elderly caregiver
MW2	31 y.o	West Java	Taipei	7 years	Elderly caregiver

recognizes that human life is conditioned, not determined. Human needs are not limited to critically reading the world but can intervene in the larger social order as an informed citizen responsibility [4].

This study explored the Indonesian migrant workers who used their second opportunity to complete their compulsory education level at a community learning center located in Taiwan. This study attempts to answer the following research question: how do the Indonesian migrant workers attend the community learning center in Taiwan? How do they manage their time and finances during.

## 2 Method

### 2.1 Research Participants

Two Indonesian women migrant workers were recruited to participate in this study. They come from the same island in Indonesia but work in a different city in Taiwan. The researchers pseudonymized the participants to keep security and privacy. It can be seen as follow (Table 1).

This study was conducted at the community learning centers in Taiwan's capital city. This program is both online and onsite learning, and it is open to all Indonesian citizens in Taiwan, including workers.

### 2.2 Data Collection and Instrumentation

This study was conducted in a qualitative study employing phenomenology as an approach [6] to discover participants' lived experiences. After the participants were identified, assured of the anonymity of their identities, and obtained informed consent, a series of schedules was conducted. First, interviews were conducted for thirty to sixty minutes through in-depth individual interviews, mostly done at the community learning center. Then, the interview questions were general to find out the phenomenon of the study. It can be seen as follow (Table 2).

### 2.3 Data Analysis

Data were transcribed by paying attention to themes that emerged and overlapped data to identify the results. The researchers organized and categorized the extensive mass data to describe, interpret, and analyze the data with a qualitative approach by adopting the managing, analyzing data, and final report [7].

**Table 2.** In-depth interview questions guideline designed by researchers

No	Questions
1	Could you please tell me your personal information?
2	How do you get the information that the community learning center program is open for Indonesian migrant workers?
3	What thing are you considering joining CLC?
4	Could you please share the reasons why you joined the community learning center?
5	How is the learning process you do at the community learning center?
6	Do you get positive things in thinking through learning while at CLC?
7	How do you arrange your time for working and studying simultaneously?
8	How do you communicate with your employee to get permission to join the community learning program?
9	How do you deal with the working load and assignment load simultaneously?
10	Do you find any obstacles in your at the community learning center?
11	How do you manage your finances to pay for tuition at the CLC?

### 3 Result and Discussion

This study aims to provide information on the experiences of Indonesian migrant workers as a worker and students simultaneously. According to the results of the study, there are three main results. These are:

1. How do the Indonesian migrant workers attend the community learning centre in Taiwan?

In their first year working in Taiwan, they try to build friendships with fellow Indonesian migrant workers, either in the same city or in different cities. Starting with good communication, they added each other's social media accounts. Then, expanding their friendship by joining the two-page group accounts of the Indonesian Muslim group and the Indonesian migrant worker group in Taiwan. So they could share and post about learning moments while working in Taiwan, whether it's the story of the struggle to do the task or the atmosphere when participating in online learning at the employer's home. Indeed, their free time to socialize with others is one way to increase their network and concern for the community [8]. Starting from seeing the post begin communicating with each other to comment on it, they began to be excited to study hard even though they were busy working in Taiwan.

*MW2 said, "I try to build friendships overseas because I still do not understand anything at the employer's house. So I need a friend to talk to and find a solution to survive and work hard. So I add friends on social media so there can be more communication time and sometimes with fellow migrant workers near the employer's house even though the time is only for a short time because there is much work at the employer's house".*

Their seniors also began to share their experiences and struggles during online and offline learning. It turns out that there are Indonesian migrant workers who study at the

Open University and CLC. Therefore, they are increasingly eager to find information on the differences between the two learning platforms. Due to their dropping out background from the compulsory education level, they have the opportunity to make up the class and get a senior high diploma through CLC. They also started looking for detailed information about the CLC program. They started following the CLC Facebook page ground to see more updates on activities at CLC.

*MW1 said, "I add and follow CLC's social media group accounts and always follow what information they post there. I saw the information on the teachers, their studies, and even the graduation ceremony for my seniors. It encourages me, and I hope to be like them." After that, I evaluated myself regarding time, finances, and self-motivation to join CLC.*

However, because it was still the first year of their work contract, there were many obstacles to joining CLC. It was still challenging to realize joining CLC and postpone the intention for more than three years. However, they are still eager to follow the information and start saving a little of their salary for the initial costs of enrolling in the CLC program.

*MW2 said, "I already had a high desire to join this program, and then I saved 200NTD - 500NTD from my salary every month to make it easier for me in the initial costs of this program. So yes, it was beneficial". In addition, I still remember the first time I was at the CLC location. I met the staff, who gave me detailed information about the package C program I ran. They were all very friendly, kind, and informative. So I feel even more motivated to join the program."*

They make plans in advance to join the CLC program. Finally, after getting complete information and opportunities from employers, they decided to join the CLC program on a second employment contract. Initially, they registered themselves directly at the CLC office in the capital city of Taiwan. The first impression when they arrived at the CLC location, they were more motivated to study there. Since CLC was formed as a learning platform for Indonesian, which is an equal education with a second chance [9]. Moreover, meeting the staff who are so friendly and their seniors who are learning and having discussions there. It was an even more extraordinary opportunity for them to meet the artists in person and discuss them in more detail.

## 2. How do they manage their time and finances during studying at CLC?

They joined the community learning program and were on their second contract because, in the first contract, they had to repay the debt to the agency that sent them to Taiwan. In the first contract, the agency costs are higher and pay the obligations of the family in the village. They are not close to the employer and have not received tips or additional salaries. While the second contract, they already have more intimate communication and relationship with the employer and get tips or extra pay from the employer. It is beneficial for them in the financial sector. Arranging their few salaries was a must to manage their wages wisely to meet their needs. Choosing the primary conditions was challenging, even though it was tough for them to share their monthly salary for personal, family, and educational expenses. It was difficult for the Indonesian migrant worker. As a breadwinner, they are trying to be wiser to sort out the more necessary needs to take precedence, and it is one of the small examples of practicing critical thinking for

individual scope [4]. And also becomes one of the aspects of maintaining their security from their employers as migrant workers abroad [10].

*MW1 remarked, "Indeed, I have few salaries as a caregiver compared with other factory workers in Taiwan. Nevertheless, I commit to utilizing it wisely. I decided to apply as a student at CLC and use my salary to pay the tuition fee. Therefore, I must postpone my desire to go shopping on my day off to save money. I dream of having a senior high diploma that I can use for future life, whether to continue my higher education or apply for other job placement in Indonesia".*

*And then MW2 remarked, "I already have a plan to join the CLC since four years ago, but I got difficulties managing my salary to pay the tuition fee. Because I still have many responsibilities for family and agency. Today, I am so grateful because I can join the CLC and meet more inspiring people".*

Their knowledge and skill during classroom learning become a provision for future careers [8]. In addition, it took much effort to attend to the community. MW1's story explained that migrant workers were motivated to complete their compulsory education as a prospect of a future life after finishing a working contract in Taiwan. They become a visible agent of change in Indonesia, at least in their family. However, they faced the challenge of dividing time in completing all the work at the employer's house, homework, and break time. They tried to get up earlier in the morning to meet the needs of the elderly such as cooking breakfast, giving medicine, and bathing. After that, they cleaned the house and cooked lunch, and at certain times they went to the hospital to check up on the health of the elderly. During their lunch break, they used their time to do assignments from their teacher. They often discussed the material through WhatsApp chat or Facebook inbox with their classmates. At night, they took online learning classes, which were sometimes also late to join the course because of the condition of the elderly who were downstate or the employer's family who was present to monitor the state of the elderly. Still, they tried to keep joining the online learning class even though they came to join it very late.

*MW1 remarked that "I have a big willingness to study. But unfortunately, I had to postpone registering for my Senior level because Indonesia's economic situation was unstable. Nevertheless, I am so grateful for completing my twelve years of study. Even, I have prepared myself to register for the university level. I have a dream to work in Indonesia as a professional worker, not as a caregiver or household worker".*

The Indonesian worker had to do the job at the workplace and attend the community learning center at night, started 09.00 pm until midnight through online learning three times a week on the weekend, and onsite learning was done once a month. They used the day off to attend the community learning program to develop themselves and expand their understanding through discussions and activities.

*MW2 said, "I have full work at the employer's home every day. So I have to do it as my duty and responsibility to be a caregiver. However, my employer is cooperative; they know I have online learning, so they did not disturb me if I had an online class. Besides, they allowed me if I stay in my room to study".*

MW2's story describes that even though she was a student, she never left her primary work as a migrant worker and consistently prioritized her duties before attending her

online class. As a result, her employer trusted to let her keep attending the community learning program. Furthermore, they worked very hard to get a monthly vacation schedule from their employer to match the onsite learning schedule at the CLC. They established good communication with the employer to get permission for a monthly vacation schedule to go to school for an onsite meeting. They were challenged to wake up earlier than usual to go to CLC, which took approximately two to three hours to get to the site by train. Because they work in different cities, they must be disciplined and on time to attend class on time even though they arrive late because they must wait for each other.

### 3. What did they learn at CLC?

CLC is a learning platform that aims to produce superior human resources with competence, knowledge, and skill for themselves and the community [9]. The learning process through discussions between students and teachers contributes positively to students' understanding of learning topics. They can even relate to their circumstances. The activity can invite students to be more aware of their position as migrant workers in Taiwan; a good understanding of their responsibilities and rights as migrant workers in their employers' homes. Furthermore, the discussion process during class learning can open their minds that they have the right to fight for their rights as migrant workers [11]. For example, they understand more and more that they have the right to have a day off at their employer's house.

*MW1 stated: "I knew we were allowed to take one day off every month and take a break from the agency when signing the work contract. However, I have difficulty fighting for my rights. However, after often expressing opinions during class discussions, I learned to argue with others and convey messages with manners and directed flow. Because of that, I am increasingly able to improve good communication relations with my employer, and I even started to give examples of positive encouragement to my fellow immigrant friends (MW2)".*

They are also aggressive in identity themselves as migrant workers in Taiwan without waiting for other parties such as agencies or employers; this curiosity and trying to find as much information as possible illustrates that their mindset is growing to solve existing problems in themselves and their surroundings. Moreover, it promotes thought and active learning in the classroom, which helps students be critical thinkers [12].

*MW1 declared, "Since I joined CLC, I have been more diligent in reading information about migrant workers. I have followed updated information issued by the Indonesian and Taiwanese governments. However, because it is very beneficial for us as migrant workers, sometimes I will get the information too late, and I cannot even get it if I have to wait for the agency".*

The illustration refers to students' sense of sensitivity and concern for themselves and understanding of the benefits or positive values of the action. It is a part of learning critical pedagogy output [13]. Developing a mindset and understanding is the primary basis for initiating positive change backward. As time passes, the participants get more confident socializing among migrant workers from Southeast Asian countries. Besides, they get appreciation from Indonesian migrant workers and employers. Conversely, they were overlooked because they were regarded as uneducated people who could not think, especially outside their job as workers.

On the other hand, they can also provide a positive understanding to their fellow Indonesian workers that they have the right to take a day off and carry out self-development, whether it is joining the CLC program, participating in Chinese language learning, or entrepreneurial activities during their off time.

*MW1 stated: "I have a friend who is a migrant worker who works close to my employer's house. She still has difficulty communicating Chinese with her employer even though she has lived in Taiwan for a year, so I suggest she joins CLC specifically to learn Chinese. Furthermore, because I had also joined CLC and her employer knew I was studying there, her employer also started to support her to develop herself in a positive direction".*

It shows that they have negotiated with others and even with their employers to get the right they should have. They also began to understand the children and their relatives that learning by completing education is one way to get out of economic poverty and a mindset in the society.

*MW2 added, "I often give understanding to children and even my younger siblings to be more active and study hard because education is precious in changing future lives, especially in looking for work or even making decisions in something."*

Therefore, as mothers of their children, they begin to maintain communication that going to school is not just learning science, but they must be able to think for their future lives. Moreover, because their lives as workers and students in Taiwan are an example to their families and children, it is a way to change their position and contribution to society and practice critical thinking in human life [12].

## 4 Conclusion

This qualitative study describes the experiences of two migrant workers who worked as full-timers and studied as a second chance in a community learning center in Taiwan. They undergo dual status as migrant workers and students, providing many positive experiences and challenges during routine activities at the employer's home and the learning process. The first challenge is time; they must be wiser in managing the schedule to complete the main tasks at the employer's house. Their primary goal is to come to Taiwan to work and get a higher salary than in Indonesia. Therefore, they must complete the main task as workers at the employer's house so that the employer trusts them more to provide a monthly holiday schedule according to the offline learning schedule on the CLC site. It is a way to build their relationship and trust with the employer.

The second challenge is finances; they get a monthly salary from their employer, which is good enough to support themselves and their families back home. They are challenged to sort out the more needed needs in this case. They are challenged in processing the salary for personal needs, agency deductions, insurance, delivery to the village, personal savings, and tuition fees in the community learning program. In this case, they are challenged to be frugal in spending money on lifestyle in Taiwan; they must be able to choose their primary needs. Therefore, they have to work more diligently at the employer's house without complaining, so the employer gives them monthly tips, which helps them pay for their personal needs. Plus, they are very helpful in paying tuition fees which can be paid in installments.



Third, the participants become more critical in understanding themselves, mapping their future lives, and interacting with the community. They also begin to be sensitive to their surroundings and engage themselves in bringing about positive change. This Becoming Critical mindset which includes attitude and behavior is developed through discussions in class [5]. Indirectly, CLC has contributed to improving the quality of human resources, which are valuable assets for the Indonesian nation. They also get positive things in undergoing two statuses at once, namely workers and students, increasing personal values, and becoming drivers of change for themselves and those around them. Indeed, the Indonesian government had roles in monitoring and protecting laborers working and studying abroad, in encouraging them to be motivated to work, learn, act, reflect, and involve themselves in social transformation. So Indonesia migrant workers had their voice and agent of change in society [13]; to be listened to and to inspire others to have their say in terms of human rights, such as getting a day off once a month and salary based on the initial agreement is a right for the Indonesian migrant workers.

This research had a limitation in the participants' number, so it is suggested that other researchers do further research by improving the number of participants. The researchers also highly appreciate additional researchers modifying the research methods using quantitative methods to produce a more varied and helpful result for educational research. The study expected that more Indonesian domestic workers get days off to have more significant opportunities to develop themselves by attending CLC and other programs.

## References

1. A. Loveband, "Positioning the product: Indonesian migrant women workers in Taiwan," *J. Contemp. Asia*, vol. 34, no. 3, pp. 336–348, 2004.
2. L.-F. Liang, "The making of an 'ideal' live-in migrant care worker: recruiting, training, matching and disciplining," *Ethn. Racial Stud.*, vol. 34, no. 11, pp. 1815–1834, 2011.
3. P. Deshingkar, "The making and unmaking of precarious, ideal subjects—migration brokerage in the Global South," *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, vol. 45, no. 14. Taylor & Francis, pp. 2638–2654, 2019.
4. H. A. Giroux, "Rethinking education as the practice of freedom: Paulo Freire and the promise of critical pedagogy," *Policy Futur. Educ.*, vol. 8, no. 6, pp. 715–721, 2010.
5. M. Breunig, "Turning experiential education and critical pedagogy theory into praxis," *J. Exp. Educ.*, vol. 28, no. 2, pp. 106–122, 2005.
6. J. W. Creswell, *Research design pendekatan kualitatif, kuantitatif, dan mixed*. Yogyakarta: Pustaka Pelajar, 2010.
7. C. Marshall and G. B. Rossman, *Designing qualitative research*. Sage publications, 2014.
8. W. P. Silalahi and F. R. Sitorus, "From frustration to enlightenment: experiences of student exchange program awardees in Taiwan," *F1000Research*, vol. 10, 2021.
9. I. HMNoor and Rahmi Rivalina, "EQUALITY OF LEARNERS CERTIFICATION AND THEIR SKILL PRODUCTION THROUGH PACKAGE C VOCATION," *Int. J. Educ. Learn. Dev.*, vol. 7, no. 4, 2019.
10. A. Maksum, "Indonesian post-migrant workers: A challenging problem for human security," *Soc. Sci. Humanit. Open*, vol. 4, no. 1, p. 100223, 2021.
11. V. R. Helderbran, "Promoting critical thinking through discussion," *J. Coll. Teach. Learn.*, vol. 4, no. 6, 2007.

12. S. E. Walker, "Active learning strategies to promote critical thinking," *J. Athl. Train.*, vol. 38, no. 3, p. 263, 2003.
13. L. M. Murawski, "Critical Thinking in the Classroom... and Beyond.," *J. Learn. High. Educ.*, vol. 10, no. 1, pp. 25–30, 2014.

**Open Access** This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits any noncommercial use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

