Identifying struggles and challenges faced by Indonesian migrant workers pursuing higher education in Taiwan

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
	People in social life often underestimated the presence of migrant workers caused by low skills and lack of education. The decision to continue higher education while working in the host country had tremendous challenges. This study aimed to develop a deeper understanding of the reasons, the problem encountered, and the learning strategies of migrant workers pursuing higher education at Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan (*Universitas Terbuka Taiwan*). There were 11 students participated in this study. This study was descriptive qualitative research, and the interactive model was applied in the analysis method. The data were gathered through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation. The finding of this study revealed that: i) The migrant workers had the high motivation to pursue higher education because they wanted to change the stereotype that they were left behind and to seek a better life when they came back to Indonesia; ii) Inadequate time was the main problem to manage the study time due to the high workload; iii) The learning strategies of migrant workers were peer learning, group discussion, and note-taking. However, Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan was the excellent choice for the migrant workers in Taiwan to pursue higher education due to the flexibility of learning.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Currently, Indonesia becomes the fourth populous country in the world. The population is around 270 million individuals. Indonesian population overgrows. The Indonesian central bureau of statistic (known in Indonesia as *Badan Pusat Statistik* (BPS) projects that the Indonesian population will exceed 284 million by 2025 and 296 million by 2030 [1]. Consequently, the high population will influence almost every sector, such as the economy, education, health, and environment. There are some negative impacts encountered for the developing country with high population growth in these sectors, such as, an inadequate supply of food, the high unemployment rate, and poverty and inequality [2].

Each year approximately 2,000,000 Indonesians enter the labor market. The Indonesian government faces particular challenges in creating and providing more jobs. One of the Indonesia government's alternative strategies is to send Indonesian people to work overseas [3]. Moreover, Koike explains that the plan to send people to work abroad also can be an economic strategy for the government to acquire remittances [4]. Since 1890, sending Indonesian people to work abroad has been started when Dutch colonized Indonesia. The Dutch government sent them to Suriname to work as the farmer. In 1947, the

government created an institution that concerns labor affairs. However, the placement of Indonesian workers is handled by a family or individual. The destination country is Malaysia and Saudi Arabia. Then, the Indonesian government made Indonesian workers' placement policy first in 1970 by the Department of Labor, Transmigration, and Cooperation with the emergence of Government Regulation no 4 of 1970, *antarkerja antardaerah* (interprovincial labor placement) and *antarkerja antarnegara* (international labor placement). Starting this regulation, the government involved the private sector in recruiting migrant workers and placing the industry. They collaborate to manage the recruitment, handle the documents, train the prospective migrant, and promote the workers to the receiving countries [5]. Given the magnitude of contribution to the country, the government declares that the migrant workers to be "*Pahlawan Devisa*" or foreign exchange heroes.

The number of Indonesian migrant workers has increased each year. There are many destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers: Malaysia, Singapore, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and South Korea. Taiwan becomes the top three destination countries for Indonesian migrant workers, after Malaysia and Hongkong. The rapid industrialization causes it since 1980 by East Asia's "four tigers," consisting of Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, and South Korea. They have become the primary destination of migrant workers from Southeast Asia to look for a job. Besides high demands for mostly "3 D" (dirty, dangerous, difficult) jobs [6], increased wages also influence them to work in Taiwan [7]. Successful work in Taiwan contributed to the financial family and increased the social status.

Unfortunately, the presence of foreign migrant workers in the host country is often underestimated by local people. In social life, the migrant workers become the "other" where their existence is invisible. The migrant workers are stigmatized as low-skill, low-educated, and needy. In March 2019, 31% of Indonesian migrant workers graduated from primary school, and 67% was graduated from secondary school [8]. Lack of education is in line with the low skill that leads to poverty. Hence, migrant workers need to have soft skills in the future. One of the keys is through education. One of the keys is through education. In his speech at Madison Park Highs School, Nelson Mandela, former president of South Africa, said that education is a weapon to change the world [9]. The primary aim of education is to sustain individual and societal improvement. This process contains both actual and moral dimensions. Francis J. Brown remarks, "education is a process which brings about changes in the behavior of society" [10]. Through education, people can develop their ability and have a positive contribution to their society's progress.

Therefore, the Indonesian Students Association as known as *Persatuan Pelajar Indonesia* (PPI) in Taiwan has been initiated to facilitate an Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan (Universitas Terbuka Taiwan or Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan in Indonesian) in 2011. This university allows migrant workers to continue their education. The right to access to higher education is also protected in several international human rights instruments. Article 13 of the International covenant on economic, social, and cultural rights is declared by the United Nations (UN) addressed, "higher education shall be made equally accessible to all ... ." In terms of Indonesian Open Learning University, open means every people may attend the school without age and study period limitation. This university offers distance learning education. It means that the education system is held mostly online learning. However, Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan also offers two offline meetings in Taipei [11].

For the final examination, Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan held both in Tainan and Taipei on Sunday for two weeks. Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan was merged with the Indonesian Economic and Trade Office (*Kantor Dagang Ekonomi Indonesia*, known as KDEI) in Taipei for the campus service because KDEI was trusted as the coordinator implementation of this university. Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan offers three majors: English literature and translation, management, and communication studies. Those three majors are provided with consideration the instructors (in Indonesia term, the teacher of UT is called a tutor) competency available in Taiwan, such as master and doctoral students studying in Taiwan. Currently, the number of Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan students is 213 students. The objectives of Indonesian Open Learning University are to provide equal opportunities for everyone, develop each learner's competencies, and raise educational attainment for Indonesian people in remote areas and around the world. Regarding those reasons, this study aims to determine why Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan pursue higher education and its problems encountered, and explore the learning strategies of Indonesian migrant workers to overcome the difficulties in pursuit of higher education. Hopefully, this research will give some useful information about Indonesian migrant workers' experience in pursuing higher education abroad for all of the readers. This study is expected to be used to reference further researchers to research in different areas.

2. RESEARCH METHOD

The study employed a descriptive qualitative research design. Creswell defines qualitative research as "an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" [12]. Bogdan and Biklen explain five qualitative research features, namely naturalistic, descriptive data, process-oriented, inductive, and meaning [13]. Creswell also adds other features, such as an emergent design, reflexity, and holistic account [14]. Some scholars agreed that these characteristics also could become the strength of qualitative research. Using qualitative research is the appropriate methodology to reveal the real-life, thoughts, and opinions. Therefore, to carry out an inquiry characterized by a comprehensive, systematic, detailed and careful examination of the struggle and strategies of migrant workers in pursuing higher education, 11 participants were involved in this study.

The respondents were seven females and four males, aged from 23–39 years old. Seven participants were majoring in English literature and translation, two participants were from communication studies, and two participants were from management major. The number of participants was not too big in order to gain rich and detailed information. The participants' criteria were one year of a college experience, including the sophomore, junior, and senior. They are also Muslim, both male and female. On the other hand, they came from heterogeneous regions in Indonesia. Further, the researcher also selected the participants who work in different jobs and workplaces in Taiwan.

In this study, the researcher used some techniques in collecting the data. Those are interview, participant observation, and documentation. To construct the validity, the researcher used triangulation. Using triangulation as a validity procedure aims to prove the evidence and corroborate the same finding [15]. This study applied method triangulation to check and recheck the consistency of the findings and eliminate the overlapping areas. Then, the interactive mode used to analyze data. There are three critical stages in the interactive model proposed by Miles *et al*. [16] as explained below:

2.1. Data condensation

It refers to the process whereby the collected data from field notes, interview transcripts, and other empirical materials will be chosen, focused on, and reduced. In this stage, the researcher selected and found the relevant information related to the study and re-examine the previously omitted data. Data condensation also includes writing the summaries, coding, and developing themes. This process started after collecting data and finished until the report is completed.

2.2. Data display

It refers to the process of organizing the information that gives the possibility to conclude. In this step, data presentation can be illustrated in the matrices, graphs, charts, networks, and other graphical formats.

2.3. Drawing and verifying conclusions

In this step, the researcher drew the structure of the result from the data display. In making the coherent finding, the initial conclusion needs to be verified by stepping back the data display and raw data; and examining the references.

There are several significant ethical issues before conducting the research. It aims not only to protect the participants but also the researcher. In this study, providing the consent form was vital to secure the participants' convenience during the research. The consent form aimed to tell the participant what the study is about and how the result will be used [17]. Their participation is voluntary. It can be stopped at any time and the rights of participants will be protected. When privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity are threatened, the result of the study will affect the quality of data. The researcher asked the participants to sign in the consent form to ensure their willingness to be involved in this study before the interview, so the participants would be comfortable during the interview.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. Motivation to pursue higher education

For the migrant workers, pursuing higher education was a high achievement because they never imagined that they could pursue it. Most of them spent their time to work hard in order to fulfill their family needs. The stereotype of migrant workers as low-skill people made them less self-esteem when they came back to Indonesia. Moreover, the label "the foreign exchange hero" showed that they were only regarded as part of an economic strategy. Working abroad was not eternal. The migrant workers had to prepare the worthwhile things to survive when they returned to Indonesia.

The issues related to migrant workers are manifold. The most discussed is language and cultural difference. Different religious beliefs, ways of thinking, and attitudes make the migrant workers felt

uncomfortable. Being confronted with a new culture and language in the new environment can produce stress [18]. Moreover, Cheng reported that the migrant workers are marginalized, stigmatized, excluded, targeted, and often blamed for things unexpected [19]. Similarly, Nessler expressed that the migrant workers are present, yet their presence is unwelcome and unwanted [20]. Due to the lack of education, the migrant workers do not have the bargaining power over the employer and society. Furthermore, education is needed to get a better future. Needless to say that education is in line identical to development, include self-development, and social development [21]. In terms of education, there are few studies related to migrant workers and higher education.

Studying at Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan was one of the ways to prepare it. The reasons for pursuing higher education were improving the skill, getting a better career, earning respect, and flexible learning. Learning a new skill could make people more developed. The skill also could be an investment for the future. Five participants revealed that their reason for pursuing higher education is self-improvement. Instead of waste time, they preferred to do useful things, such as pursuing higher education. Each participant had their own dream for the future. Pursuing higher education was one of the ways to get a better carrier and future. They wanted the job opportunity to get a higher position. According to Maslow as cited in Saul McLeod, eight human needs were divided into growth needs and deficiency needs [22]. Deficiency needs are the basic need for survival in life, such as biological and physiological, safety, belongingness and love, and esteem needs. Growth needs or being needs are considered the top level of the individual to seek a better life, such as cognitive, aesthetic, self-actualization, and transcendence needs. Improving the skill in the pursuit of higher education might impact their self-actualization. Acquiring the knowledge was suitable for the cognitive needs. One of participant felt so happy because she could continue her study that ever interruption. Moreover, she could take the major that related to her previous major, a namely English major. Her previous major was English education.

On the other hand, the other motivation to pursue higher education was to earn respect. The negative stereotype that migrant worker was a low skill and lack of education made them feels inferior. Gaining respect made people could increase their self-esteem. The satisfaction of the self-esteem needs to be led to feelings of self-confidence, worth, adequacy of being useful self-actualization and necessary in their life. All of the participants agreed that in Indonesia culture, the neighbors would respect more with people were well educated. However, respect could be gained from anywhere, such as the economy, descendant, and so on. Still, obtaining a high academic was prestigious. On the other hand, pursuing higher education could raise their self-esteem. All humans had a need to be respected but commonly the migrant workers were often underestimated in the society. When they engaged in education, they felt accepted and respected. Therefore, they wanted to prove it. Eight of eleven participants were the first generation to attend the college. They hoped that their participation in higher education could be a role model for their family that education was important in their life. All of the participants said that personal motives became their motivation to pursue higher education. It was congruent with Knowles *et al.* in assuming of andragogy characteristics that the motivation to learn comes from internal of each individual [23] . In the globalization era, the migrant workers realized that the work competition is high. On the other hand, they realized that in a certain period, they wanted to come back to Indonesia, work there, and close to the family. Earning higher level of education also impacted more respect from society.

Financial problems were not the main problem for the participants in pursuing higher education due to the high wage earned in Taiwan. The fee was affordable because the college fee is equal for Indonesian Open Learning University (or UT), either Indonesia or foreign countries. The fee was around 6,500 NTD per semester (approximately IDR 3,300,000), including tuition fee and operational fee. The requirements are quite easy. A prospective student must apply online or come to the Indonesian economic and trade office (KDEI), Taipei and predetermined Indonesian restaurant at Tainan and Zhongli. The administrative requirement was a legalized high-school certificate and two sheets of the photo in 2x3-inch size. There was no limitation on age and the period of study. On the other hand, for the informal job workers, such as care-taker, nanny, housekeeper, they had to ask their employers' permission. Not all employers allowed their workers to pursue higher education. They stigmatized the maid. Therefore, they were so thankful that their employer supported them. One of participants revealed that her employer set up Wi-Fi immediately for her in order to learn well. Her employer sometimes gave the transportation fee of 1,000 NTD to attend the class in Taipei. In contrast, asking permission from the head of company was optional. One of participants said that he did not explicitly tell the overseers because his study time was outside working hours.

In addition, the strength of the distance learning system also became consideration. The learning process would be held at night after they finished their working. The schedule of the online class was different from each other. It was determined according to the agreement between the students and the instructors. At Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan, the flexible learning was fit to the workers because they could choose where, when, and how they study as revealed Graham *et al*. stated that blended

learning combined the technology, face-to-face, and online learning [24]. The students just need to sit and open the laptop to access learning. They do not have to attend the physic class regularly. Flexible learning gave the choice to the students that they could study anywhere and everywhere.

3.2. Barriers to study at Indonesian open learning university of Taiwan

Most of the participants said that lack of time became the main barriers to learning at Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan. They said that it was their first time in pursuit of higher education. On the contrary, one of participants did not face this problem because she ever pursued higher education in Indonesia.

Five participants who worked in the factory had to work for several shifts, two until three times. For two shifts works, their working hour was 12 hours, eight hours was regular work and four hours were overtime. On the other hand, for three shift works, the first shift started from 8.30 a.m.–4.30 p.m., the second shift was from 4.30 p.m.–12.30 a.m., and the third shift was from 12.30 a.m.–08.30 p.m. Three industrial workers had the holiday during the weekend on Saturday and Sunday and another two industrial workers had only Sunday off. Therefore, they were late or absent from attending the online class at night.

The caregivers also had a similar problem, but they had a different rest period. Two participants had the rest period from 8 p.m. For another two participants, their rest break was from 9 p.m. One of participants had the leisure time at night from 10 p.m.; other had the leisure time since 11 a.m. However, when their employer was sick, they had to stand by for 24 hours.

During the working time, all participants declared that they seldom hold the mobile phone. They tried to build the trust of the employers who allowed them to pursue higher education. Not all of the participants had a holiday each week. In their last employer, two participants had the day off on Sunday. Other caregivers only had the holiday when they attended the offline class and the final exam. They did not protest their employers' policy because they were thankful because their employers permitted them to attend the college. Social support also had an impact on the motivation of participants in the pursuit of higher education. Power existed when there was a relationship. Family, friends, and employers' power affected the participants' psychology as Foucault said that power could come from everywhere [25]. From this finding, several participants could negotiate with the "power". It was in line with Foucault statement that where there is power, there is resistance. However, one case could not resist the power of the employer. As the migrant worker who was perceived "other", they had to adapt to the new environment.

All of the participants agreed that the period of studying at Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan was too short. Each semester was approximately three months, including the final exam. They had to finish reading the thick module that contained 300–400 pages. They also must finish the assignment from the instructors and central UT of Indonesia. On the other hand, they also needed to participate in the online forum discussion. All the participants said that they always completed the instructors' assignment because when they had not finished it yet, the instructor would give them the deadline extension. Besides that, the assignments of an instructor were not too much. They could send the assignment through instructors' social media, such as email, Facebook, and Line. On the contrary, submission assignments from central UT of Indonesia were through the e-learning platform. They had to upload the task on time and deal with the strict deadline. When the deadline passed, they could not submit the task again. All participants declared the assignments from central UT of Indonesia were too much and the submission deadline was too close to each other course. Each participant said they ever forgot to submit or even did not finish the tasks from central UT of Indonesia because they did not have enough time. The learning period that was only three months with the overload information made them not understand the material clearly and thoroughly. This finding was in line with Kara *et al.* reported that distance learners should have good time management [26].

Further, internet connection was also the primary key to Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan's learning because the learning system mostly relied on online learning. The students had to attend the online class, upload the assignment, and discuss online used internet. On the other hand, they also had to find another online resource and communicate with the instructors and the classmates. Therefore, a stable signal was needed by the students to facilitate the learning. Five of eleven participants still encountered this problem. They faced internet issues, particularly at night, in attending online classes. The process of learning that depended on the online requires a stable network. The unstable network effect affected their distance learning process. Similar to this finding, Alebaikan and Troudi revealed internet connection is the boundary in conducting distance learning [27].

3.3. Learning strategies while working

To achieve the goal, each participant had a different strategy. As independent learners, the participants had to find and understand what learning strategies were fit for them. The participants revealed some successful learning strategies: peer-learning and study group, asking the instructor, and note-taking.

In the new environment, all the participants had to adapt to a new language, social norm, and culture, including working habits, food, and lifestyle. They expressed that they lack knowledge and experiences about the new culture of work setting and society in general, such as recycling, waiting in line, going to the post office, and taking the transportations. Compared with international students who had many opportunities to get guidance about on and off-campus life, the migrant workers were hired to produce good work performance to their employer and the company. They got few opportunities to learn about how to do things in their everyday lives.

3.3.1.   Peer learning and study group

Each participant had a diverse learning preference. All participants expressed that they feel comfortable interacting with the classmates because they mostly had the same ethnic background. On the other hand, the similar occupation made them support each other. Therefore, making contact with other peers was not preventable. They revealed peer learning and study group was their strategy in learning. This strategy saved time because they could solve the problem together regarding the course and assignments. Studying at Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan, the students were encouraged to initiate learning. There was no teacher control them. The demand of being an independent learner somehow made them feel stressed. They were involved with the study group and peer-learning. This finding was in line with Raymond *et al.* who stated that peer learning helps distance learners [28].

One of participants who ever pursued English major in the previous college said that she supported other peers by explaining what their peers cannot understand or know about the learning materials. She was perceived as a smart student by her classmates due to her high academic achievement. However, she also asked and discussed with other peers when she faced difficulty. Besides peer learning, several students revealed that they also had the group discussion. The study group also could be an effective way to study. Bukaliya and Mubika reported that small group discussion is useful for the distance learner [29]. All the participants said that the group discussion was designed from the initiative of each class. On the other hand, they also had a discussion arranged by Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan. They could access through the e-learning platform. The number of discussion participants consisted of various student from other Indonesian Open Learning University, either Indonesia or foreign countries. However, they did know each other. Some participants expressed disappointment when joining the discussion forums because many participants did not respond to what was discussed; the instructors were in Indonesia were also rarely involved in the discussion. However, five participants revealed that they created the online group with other peers since the first semester. They told a similar purpose of making the online group, namely discussing about the learning barriers encountered and sharing the information.

3.3.2.   Asking the instructor

Successful online learners had to participate actively in the class. Online learners who took the opportunity to engage with the instructors and classmates tend to get good result from their classes. One of participant said that the instructors' role at Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan was to manage the content and student progress. There were three instructors. First was an instructor for each course. Unfortunately, based on Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan's policy, they only provided three instructors for three courses for each class. In case the courses were more than three, the student had to learn independently. Each class would get three instructors when the class had more ten students. Since the second year, she did not have that kind of instructor due to a lack of students. The second was an instructor for consulting. This instructor taught three courses immediately for the class, which were less than ten students. For two participants who are in their fourth year of study, they only had the instructor consultation. Besides, there was also a mini-paper instructor in the fourth year of study. This instructor was concerned to help the students to finish the mini-paper. The instructors were master and doctoral students who studied in Taiwan and were selected by Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan. The instructors' obligation the same as the lecturer in Indonesia; the main difference was the instructor delivered the materials using Skype and uploaded them to YouTube.

All participants reported that they often asked the instructors if they did not understand the material clearly or asked the hints of assignments. Seven participants often asked the questions in the class. However, they preferred to ask face-to-face in the offline class than in the online class. Asking questions face-to-face made them more understanding. Other participants tended to be a listener in the class. They would speak if the instructor asked them.

The result indicated that participate actively and asking the instructor can enhance high academic achievement. It was in line with Ekmekci, who stated that building a relationship with the instructor is useful for improving the chance of success and helping the instructor understand the student's needs [30]. In the learning process, the interaction with the instructors and peers could help them in order to be a success. This

finding was similar to Raymond *et al*. who reported a positive correlation between interaction with teacher and peers [31]. By interacting with the instructor, the entire participants declared that they could get familiar with and reduce misunderstanding of the course content. Several participants revealed that some instructors would give feedback their assignment to them.

3.3.3. Note-taking

All of the participants stated that they got receive much information for each course. Usually, each week they had three online classes. The learning material could be read offline through module book or online accessed from the campus website. They also got the material in PowerPoint from their instructors. Therefore, they needed to take notes to process, sort, and organize the information they needed. There are many reasons people take notes, including learning, enhancing long-term retention, and documenting events [31]. In the class, several participants revealed that they often took some notes and others not. Three participants said that they preferred to type a note using the laptop when she attended the online class. Two participants preferred handwritten notes. One of participants preferred to take a note in a book and she liked to note the difficult vocabularies and other participants used paper for taking notes. Besides learning in the class, the participants still needed to read their thick module book, especially for the course where there was no instructor. They also needed to review the material to prepare for the final exam. Moreover, three participants preferred to take a note in module book directly. Meanwhile, two participants used a pen to mark the important content and one of participants put some notes on stick paper. Male participants admitted they seldom took the notes.

4. CONCLUSION

The finding showed that the migrant workers had high motivation to pursue higher education because they wanted to change the negative stereotype that they were left behind and to seek a better life when they came back to Indonesia. Hence, Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan's presence could facilitate the migrant workers who had the motivation to pursue higher education. Indonesian Open Learning University of Taiwan offered flexible learning so they could study wherever and whenever. However, working and studying coincide was not an easy thing to do. There were some problems encountered, especially time management. The migrant workers could not manage time in a balance due to other responsibilities and distractions. Because the learning system was distance education, a stable network was required. On the other hand, they had to be able to learn independently. Several learning strategies were conducted to overcome the problems, such as peer learning, group discussion, and note-taking. Pursuing higher education had an impact on their way of thinking becomes critical. They became more mature and responsible. To sum up, the struggle in the pursuit of higher education should be appreciated. The migrant workers still need social life support and guidance to improve their academic performance.

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