CAPACITY BUILDING IN JOB SUSTAINABILITY FOR PERMAI MEMBERS IN PULAU PINANG, MALAYSIA

Eri MARLAPA[1]*, Noor Hazlina AHMAD[2], Sri Marti PRAMUDENA[3], and Khozaeni Bin RAHMAD[4]
[1,3]*Faculty of Economics and Bussiness, Universitas Mercu Buana, Indonesia*
[2]*School of Management, Universiti Sains Malaysia, Malaysia*
[4]*Pertubuhan Masyarakat Indonesia (PERMAI)Pulai Pinang, Malaysia*
[*]*eri.marlapa@mercubuana.ac.id*

ABSTRACT

This Community Service Program (PPM) aims to improve the self-actualization, competitiveness, and adaptability of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, particularly members of the PERMAI organization in Penang. The challenges posed by regional labor competition, especially after the implementation of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), include low productivity, limited education, and insufficient skills among Indonesian workers. To address these issues, the program offers psychoeducation, training, and the introduction of new competencies such as digital literacy, sustainability-focused green skills, and an entrepreneurial mindset. These skills are designed to better prepare participants for the global job market, ensuring long-term employment sustainability and economic contribution. The program targets 50-100 PERMAI members from diverse professional backgrounds, including factory workers, lecturers, and data analysts. Through lectures, discussions, and interactive workshops, the initiative aims to boost self-efficacy in career and business planning while enhancing both hard and soft skills. The integration of digital competencies and environmental awareness aligns with global trends in sustainable work practices, contributing to the development of technology-driven and environmentally responsible workers. The anticipated outcomes include improved career planning, entrepreneurial development, and green job practices. The findings are expected to add theoretical value to sustainable human resource development and digital upskilling.

Keywords: permai ngo, digital literacy, green skills, critical thinking, creativity, communication, collaboration, entrepreneurial mindset

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is currently grappling with numerous challenges in enhancing its human resource potential to effectively compete in the global labor market. With the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) now fully operational, the regional competition for jobs has intensified, placing pressure on Indonesian workers to upgrade their skills and competencies. Despite having a large labor force, Indonesia's workforce suffers from a range of issues, including low productivity, inadequate education, and a shortage of critical skills. These factors collectively make it difficult for many Indonesians to secure high-paying jobs in their home country, pushing them to seek employment abroad as migrant workers. A significant portion of these workers are employed in informal sectors, such as domestic work, which often offer limited earning potential and substandard working conditions.

The central issue addressed in this study revolves around the insufficient preparation and empowerment of Indonesian migrant workers in international labor markets. The inadequacies in skill development are further exacerbated by outdated policies, such as Law No. 39 of 2004, which largely focuses on procedural formalities without adequately addressing the need for comprehensive worker empowerment. The law lacks components of economic, social, and cultural support, which are critical for ensuring that Indonesian workers can compete globally. The growing importance of a knowledge-based economy and technological advancements in the workplace underscore the urgent need for reforms that equip workers with the right skills and tools.

This study seeks to explore strategies for improving the self-efficacy and competitiveness of Indonesian migrant workers, especially those who have returned home, referred to as TKI Purna. By fostering both hard skills (technical competencies) and soft skills (behavioral and interpersonal skills), the study aims to enhance the employability and overall welfare of these workers. The development of soft skills—such as communication, problem-solving, and teamwork—has been widely recognized as essential in helping individuals adapt to complex work environments. These skills are especially important for migrant workers who often face cultural and language barriers when working abroad.

A critical component of the study involves collaboration with PERMAI, an Indonesian community organization based in Penang, Malaysia. PERMAI plays a crucial role in supporting the needs of Indonesian workers, offering them a network of resources and assistance. This research will examine the effectiveness of current empowerment programs run by PERMAI and propose new strategies for improving the capabilities of Indonesian workers. The study focuses on practical and actionable insights that can improve the overall economic success of these workers while also contributing to Indonesia's broader efforts to enhance its human capital.

Furthermore, a key aspect of the program involves addressing the specific skills gaps identified among members of the PERMAI organization. These workers, hailing from various sectors such as SMEs, factory work, and restaurant services, often lack the 4C competencies: Critical Thinking, Creativity, Communication, and Collaboration. In the context of the 21st century, where technology is deeply embedded in nearly every industry, workers must acquire these core competencies to remain relevant and competitive. This study will integrate the 4C framework into the training initiatives, ensuring that participants develop both cognitive and practical skills that are critical in a modern, technology-driven economy.

To bridge the existing skills gap, this community service program will focus on providing comprehensive training that fosters critical thinking through interactive discussions, creativity through targeted skill development in specialized fields, communication by improving language and interpersonal abilities, and collaboration through team-based learning activities. Additionally, the training will incorporate the use of digital platforms and multimedia tools, recognizing that the internet and other technologies have become indispensable in today's learning environments. By incorporating these elements into the training, the program seeks to provide participants with a more holistic and forward-thinking education.

Finally, this program aligns closely with Indonesia's Independent Learning Campus (MBKM) curriculum and the Higher Education Key Performance Indicators (IKU), which emphasize lifelong learning, inclusivity, and responsiveness to community needs. The program not only focuses on improving the technical and soft skills of the participants but also introduces concepts of sustainability and green technology. By integrating sustainable practices, the program will prepare migrant workers to engage in environmentally responsible activities, ensuring that they are well-equipped for jobs in the green economy—an emerging sector that promises significant growth opportunities. This holistic approach, addressing both immediate employability concerns and long-term sustainability, is expected to generate positive social and economic impacts for the migrant workforce.

METHOD

Implementation of PkM Activities

The Program Kemitraan Masyarakat (PkM) was designed to transfer knowledge and enhance the skills of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, with a particular focus on human resource development and sustainable employment. The program provided comprehensive training on business strategies and the practical benefits of workforce skill enhancement. A key component of the program was improving participants' ability to maintain job continuity and increase wage levels through performance enhancement. This aligns with human capital theory (Becker, 1993), which emphasizes that investment in human resources, such as education and training, leads to improved productivity and economic returns. The training sessions targeted 50 migrant workers from various industries, ensuring that they met selection criteria, including current employment status, a minimum of one year of work experience, proficiency in Bahasa Indonesia, and a commitment to attending all sessions.

Participant-Centered Approach and Personalization

During the implementation, participants were encouraged to share their personal interests and career goals, which allowed the program to be tailored to their individual needs. Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984) supports this participant-centered approach, suggesting that adults learn best when they can relate the material to their personal experiences. This methodology ensured that the training sessions were relevant, practical, and effective in addressing the unique challenges faced by each participant. Personalized training enhances intrinsic motivation (Ryan & Deci, 2000), which is essential for adult learners, particularly migrant workers striving for better career prospects

Program Evaluation and Sustainability

The effectiveness and sustainability of the PkM activities were assessed using a combination of pre- and post-program questionnaires, tracking changes in participants' understanding and self-efficacy. This aligns with Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick, 1998), which emphasizes the importance of measuring reaction,

learning, behavior, and results. Continuous engagement with participants through follow-up meetings and additional training sessions was planned to ensure long-term success. This strategy is crucial for fostering a culture of continuous improvement in human resource development, particularly in the context of global labor markets, where adaptability is key (Tarique & Schuler, 2010).

Partner Collaboration and Active Engagement

The success of the PkM program was also attributed to the active participation of stakeholders from both Malaysia and Indonesia. This collaboration was facilitated through online meetings, which allowed partners, faculty members, and students to jointly design solutions and address the specific needs of the migrant workers. According to stakeholder theory (Freeman, 1984), effective partnerships between diverse stakeholders lead to better decision-making and outcomes. The collaborative effort in this program aligns with the triple helix model of innovation (Etzkowitz & Leydesdorff, 2000), where academia, government, and industry work together to solve societal challenges.

Roles of the Implementation Team

The implementation team, which consisted of the chief executive, lecturers, and students, played a critical role in the success of the program. Transformational leadership theory (Bass & Avolio, 1994) underpins the role of the chief executive, whose responsibility was to oversee coordination and ensure the program's alignment with strategic goals. Lecturers provided technical guidance and curriculum development, while students contributed through logistical support and facilitation of field activities. In line with service-learning principles (Eyler & Giles, 1999), this collaborative approach not only benefited the migrant workers but also offered students valuable hands-on experience in community service and development

Challenges and Limitations

Despite the success of the PkM program, several limitations were identified. The small sample size of 50 participants may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Indonesian migrant workers. Sampling bias is a concern, as participants' willingness to engage may reflect a higher level of intrinsic motivation compared to non-participants. Additionally, cultural and contextual factors, such as differences in working conditions in Malaysia, could have influenced the effectiveness of certain strategies. As Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory (Hofstede, 1980) suggests, cross-cultural variations need to be considered when implementing workforce development programs, as these differences can impact participant outcomes and behavior

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the PkM program revealed significant improvements in participants' self-efficacy and confidence in career planning and business strategies. According to Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1997), individuals with higher self-efficacy are more likely to persist in the face of challenges and succeed in achieving their goals. This finding is supported by Yuliana et al. (2021), who showed that psychoeducation interventions can effectively boost career-related self-confidence. Moreover, the demographic analysis revealed that the majority of participants were middle-aged, which corresponds with age diversity theory (Setiawan & Anggraini, 2017), emphasizing the need for tailored interventions that address the specific needs of older workers. The program's outcomes also align with international development research (Smith & Osei, 2020), which highlights the importance of targeted interventions in enhancing workforce competitiveness in global markets.

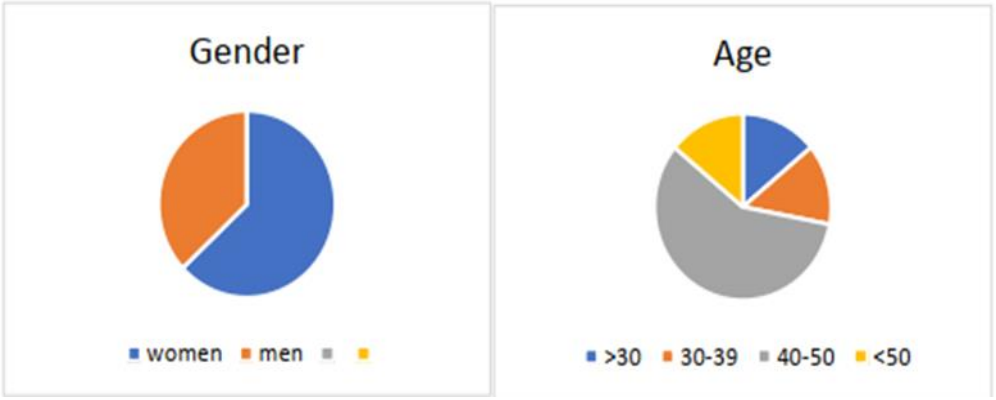


Figure 1. Gender and Age

Participant Occupation Overview

Participants in this community service program come from a wide range of occupations, including laborers, migrant workers, self-employed individuals, oil refinery workers, traders, builders, contractors, and housewives. This occupational diversity underscores the complexity of the challenges faced by Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia, as each group encounters distinct barriers to workforce development and skill enhancement. **Social identity theory** (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that individuals' job roles and occupational identities can impact their learning preferences and experiences, making it essential for the program to adopt a tailored approach that addresses the specific needs of these various occupational groups.

Community-Centered Program Assessment

To gauge the program's effectiveness in Kampung Tuk Subuh, Bukit Minyak, Pulau Pinang, a questionnaire was distributed to participants to assess their expectations and satisfaction with the program's implementation. The questionnaire covered key aspects such as the relevance of the material presented, the teaching methods employed, the adequacy of facilities and infrastructure, and the cohesiveness of the implementation Team. According to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Maslow, 1943), satisfying the participants' basic and psychological needs—such as competence, social belonging, and learning infrastructure—are essential for fostering motivation and engagement. The ability of the program to meet these needs would directly influence participants' overall satisfaction and outcomes.

Measuring Presenter Competence and Program Packaging

One of the critical factors assessed in the questionnaire was the competence of the presenters in delivering the program content. Effective delivery requires not only subject matter expertise but also the ability to engage diverse audiences, which ties into **Vygotsky's Sociocultural Theory** (Vygotsky, 1978). This theory emphasizes that learning is a socially mediated process, where interaction with knowledgeable individuals can enhance participants' understanding and skills. Additionally, how the program was "packaged"—i.e., the presentation of the material, the use of engaging activities, and the structure of the sessions—was critical in maintaining participant interest and ensuring information retention. This aligns with **cognitive load theory** (Sweller, 1988), which suggests that well-structured learning materials can reduce cognitive overload and improve learning outcomes.

Community Engagement and Enthusiasm

The program also evaluated the level of community enthusiasm for the activities. **Community-based participatory research (CBPR)** emphasizes the importance of involving community members in the design and implementation of programs to foster higher levels of engagement and ownership (Israel et al., 1998). By involving participants in interactive activities, discussions, and collaborative learning, the program aimed to maximize community involvement and enthusiasm. Research has shown that when community members actively participate, their learning outcomes and satisfaction levels tend to improve, which aligns with the findings from similar international development programs (Smith & Osei, 2020).

Program Benefits and Impact on the Community

Participants were asked to assess the perceived benefits of the training for both themselves and the wider community. The **Theory of Planned Behavior** (Ajzen, 1991) provides a useful framework for understanding how participants' attitudes, perceived social norms, and perceived behavioral control influence their intentions to apply the knowledge gained from the program. The program's focus on practical skills, including **career planning, self-efficacy**, and **business development**, was designed to provide tangible benefits that could be transferred back to the participants' communities, thereby contributing to economic development at the local level

Satisfaction and Meeting Expectations

Participants' expectations and overall satisfaction with the program were measured using a four-point Likert scale ranging from "very unimportant" to "very important." **Expectation Disconfirmation Theory** (Oliver, 1980) provides insight into how participants' pre-program expectations align with their post-program satisfaction. If the program met or exceeded participants' expectations, they were more likely to report higher satisfaction levels. By carefully designing the program to address the specific needs of the migrant workers and providing tailored interventions, the program aimed to ensure that participants felt their time and efforts were valued and that the outcomes were relevant to their career development.

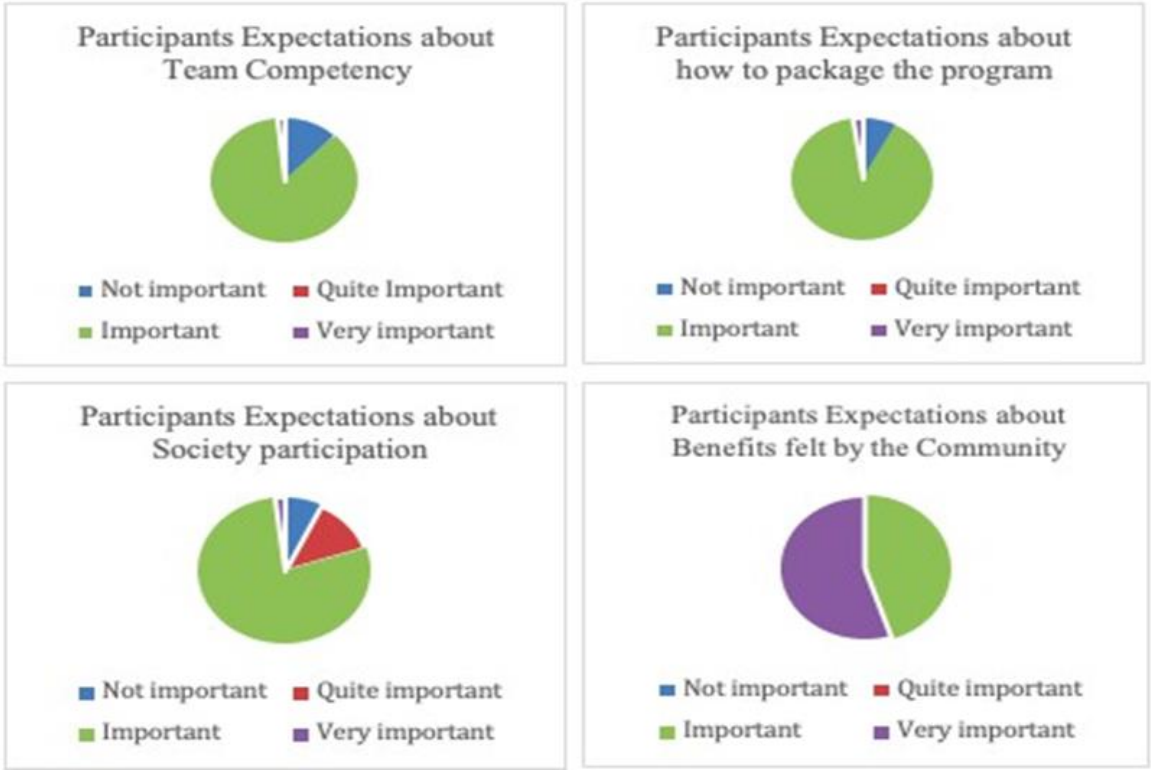
Data-Driven Feedback for Program Improvement

The results of the participant questionnaire provided valuable feedback for refining future iterations of the program. By analyzing the participants' responses to each element of the program—ranging from material relevance to infrastructure adequacy—the organizers could identify strengths and areas for improvement. Continuous feedback loops (Senge, 1990) are a key element of organizational learning and program sustainability, as they allow facilitators to adjust the program based on real-time feedback, ensuring that it remains responsive to participants' evolving needs. This approach also aligns with Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Evaluation Model (Kirkpatrick, 1998), which emphasizes the importance of using participant feedback to enhance program effectiveness over time.

Table 1. Participants' Expectation for Community Service Activities

No.	Variable	Not Important		Quite Important		Important		Very Important		%
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	
1	Material	2	9	2	9	10	45	8	36	100
2	Method	0	0	2	9	14	64	6	27	100
3	Supporting Facilities and Infrastructure	2	9	1	5	10	45	9	41	100
4	Implementation Team Cohesion	1	5	1	5	11	50	9	41	100
5	Implementation Team Competency	2	9	0	0	14	64	6	27	100
6	How to Package the Program	1	5	0	0	13	59	8	36	100
7	Society Participation	1	5	2	9	12	55	7	32	100
8	Benefit Felt by the Community	0	0	0	0	10	45	12	55	100
9	Community Interest and Enthusiasm	1	5	1	5	16	73	4	18	100
10	Community Satisfaction	1	5	2	9	12	55	7	32	100
11	Community Expectations	0	0	3	14	12	55	7	32	100
12	Execution Time	0	0	2	9	10	45	10	45	100

Figure 2. Pie chart of Respondent Answer (Cont.)



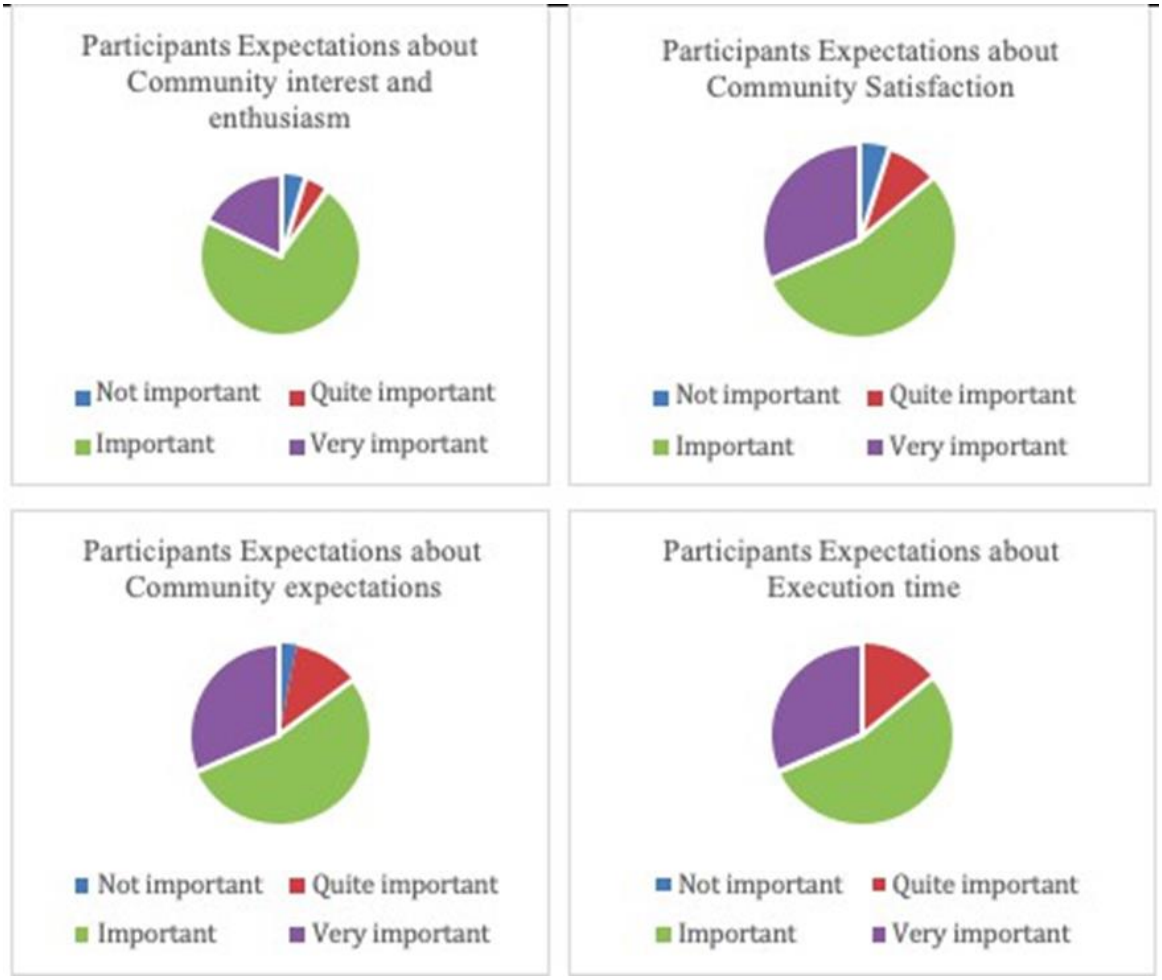


Figure 2. Pie chart of Respondent Answer

Based on the results of the questionnaire regarding participants' expectations regarding Community Service activities on figure 2, the majority of participants have high expectations, both regarding materials, methods, facilities and infrastructure, the Implementation Team and implementation time. According satisfaction of the activities, the participants feel satisfy with this activity. In other words, this activity was in line with their expectations.

Table 2. Participants' Expectation for Community Service Activities

No.	Variable	Not Satisfied		Quite Satisfied		Satisfied		Very Satisfied		%
		Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	Σ	%	
1	Material	1	5	3	14	12	55	6	27	100
2	Method	2	9	3	14	8	36	9	41	100
3	Supporting Facilities and Infrastructure	1	5	3	14	10	45	8	36	100
4	Implementation Team Cohesion	1	5	1	5	11	50	9	41	100
5	Implementation Team Competency	0	0	1	5	12	55	9	41	100
6	How to Package the Program	0	0	1	5	12	55	9	41	100

7	Society Participation	1	5	2	9	10	45	9	41	100
8	Benefit Felt by the Community	1	5	1	5	8	36	12	55	100
9	Community Interest and Enthusiasm	0	0	1	5	14	64	7	32	100
10	Community Satisfaction	1	5	1	5	7	32	13	59	100
11	Community Expectations	0	0	0	0	8	36	14	64	100
12	Execution Time	0	0	2	9	6	27	14	64	100

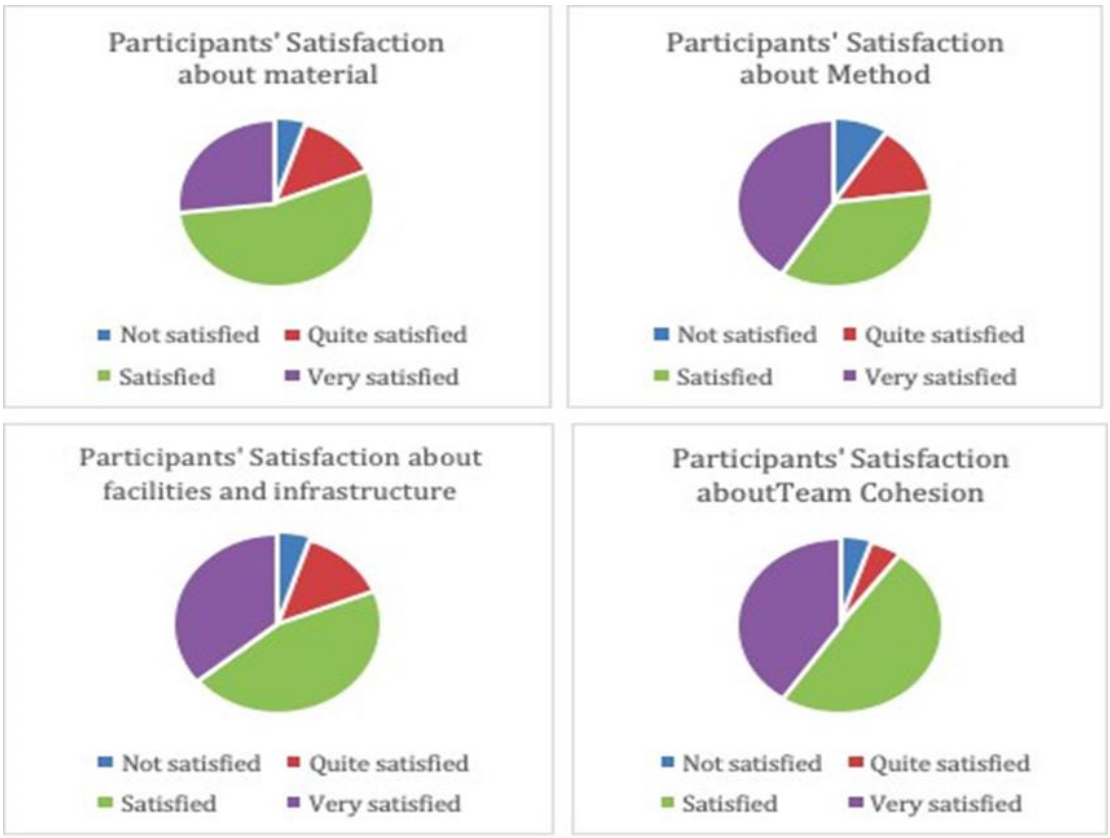
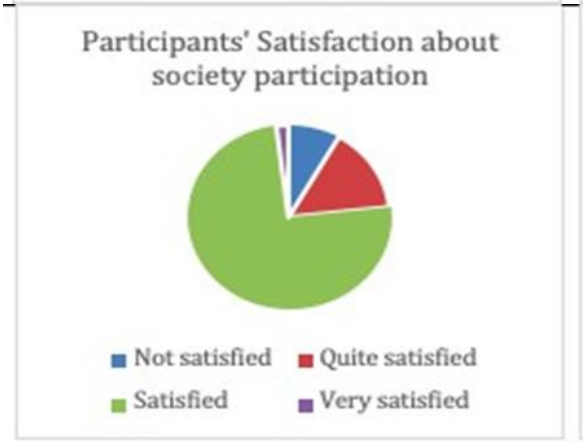
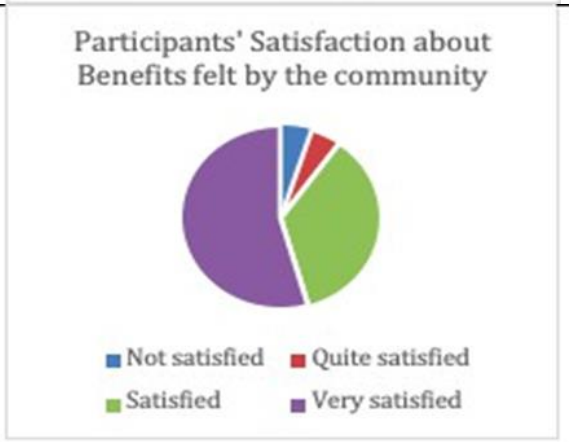


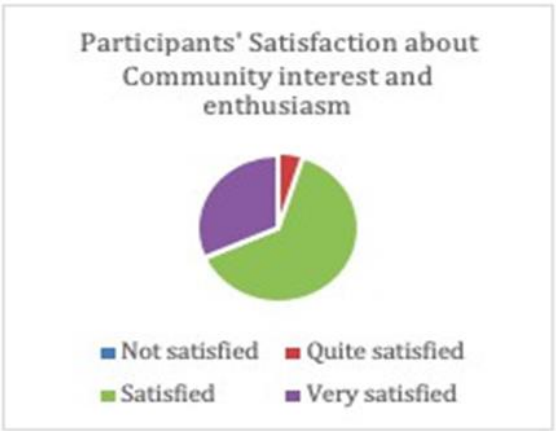
Figure 3. Pie Chart of Respondent Answers (Cont.)

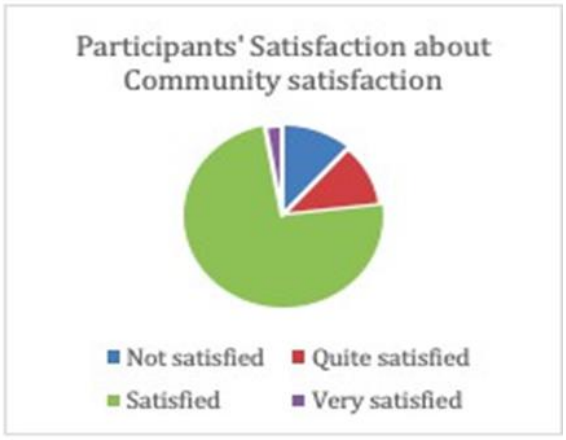
Participants' Satisfaction about Team Competency
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied

Participants' Satisfaction about how to package the program
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied


Participants' Satisfaction about society participation
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied


Participants' Satisfaction about Benefits felt by the community
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied


Participants' Satisfaction about Community interest and enthusiasm
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied


Participants' Satisfaction about Community satisfaction
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied

Participants' Satisfaction about Community expectations
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied

Participants' Satisfaction about execution time
Not satisfied
Quite satisfied
Satisfied
Very satisfied

Figure 3. Pie Chart of Respondent Answers

CONCLUSION

Participant Satisfaction with Community Service Activities

Based on the results of the questionnaire assessing participant satisfaction with the Community Service activities, the majority of participants reported a high level of satisfaction. Participants found the content, teaching methods, and the facilities provided during the program to be both relevant and effective. They also praised the Implementation Team for their professionalism and the efficient management of the activity schedule. This positive response aligns with Kirkpatrick's Model of Training Evaluation (1998), which emphasizes the importance of assessing participant reactions to measure the success of an educational program. Participants reported that the activities were highly beneficial to their personal and professional development, particularly in enhancing their skills and career prospects.

Future Program Continuation and Demand

Participants expressed a strong desire for similar programs to be conducted in the future. This reflects the concept of lifelong learning (Candy, 1991), which highlights the importance of continuous personal and professional development, particularly in dynamic and competitive environments such as the global job market. By providing targeted and relevant training, the program fulfilled participants' immediate learning needs and also created anticipation for future learning opportunities. The program's ability to cater to the specific needs of migrant workers, combined with its practical applications, suggests that it has successfully addressed a gap in skills development for this demographic.

Recommendations for Future Research and Practical Applications

Expanding Participant Demographics: Future research should aim to include a more diverse demographic profile, including participants from various age groups, genders, and professional backgrounds. This approach will enable researchers to develop a deeper understanding of the unique challenges faced by different sub-groups of migrant workers. The Social Identity Theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) suggests that individuals' identity within social and occupational groups can influence their learning behaviors and outcomes. By tailoring interventions based on these diverse needs, future programs can provide more effective, personalized training solutions.

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies (Menard, 2002) is essential for evaluating the long-term impact of the PKM program on participants' career development, self-efficacy, and job satisfaction. These studies would allow researchers to track the sustainability of the program's benefits over time, providing valuable insights into whether the skills and knowledge acquired during the training lead to measurable career advancement. This approach can also identify areas where further intervention may be needed to support long-term success.

Enhanced Skill Development Programs: Future programs should implement more targeted skill development workshops that address both hard skills (technical proficiency) and soft skills (communication, teamwork). Research (Robles, 2012) shows that combining these skills leads to better career outcomes, as soft skills are increasingly recognized as critical to success in today's interconnected, global workforce. Providing participants with a balanced approach to skill development will further enhance their employability and competitiveness in the global market.

Collaborative Initiatives: Strengthening partnerships with local businesses, educational institutions, and community organizations in Malaysia can create a more comprehensive support system for Indonesian migrant workers. Collaborative Learning Theory (Dillenbourg, 1999) emphasizes that learning is enhanced when diverse groups work together toward common goals. By fostering such collaborations, future programs can expand the resources and opportunities available to migrant workers, ensuring they have access to both education and employment networks that support their long-term career growth.

Policy Advocacy: The findings from this research can be used to advocate for policy changes that support the better integration of migrant workers into the workforce. Policy feedback theory (Pierson, 1993) suggests that research outcomes can influence the development of more inclusive labor policies, particularly in terms of providing migrant workers with better access to training and development resources. By using the data collected from the program, future research can highlight the specific needs of migrant workers and push for reforms that improve their working conditions and opportunities.

Technology Integration: Leveraging digital tools and platforms (Siemens, 2005) can enhance the accessibility of training materials and career development resources, enabling participants to continue their learning even after the formal program has ended. With the increasing reliance on technology in the workplace, incorporating digital learning into the training curriculum can ensure that participants stay connected to up-to-date knowledge and skills. This would also allow migrant workers to remotely access educational resources, making it easier for them to balance work and learning.

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