Indonesian Migrant Worker Learning Communities in Taiwan: It is Not Only Online Learning, It is Our Gathering

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Abstract
This research purported to gain a more thoughtful and insightful understanding of female Indonesian migrant workers’ perceptions and experiences on online learning in Taiwan. To achieve this research purpose, researchers collected qualitative data from a series of in-depth interviews with five participants who joined online learning in community learning through one of Taiwan’s largest women religious NGOs, Salimah Taiwan. The Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was purposely selected to analyze the data to draw the participants’ lived experiences during online learning. The five significant theme findings were intrinsically interwoven and pivotal to adult learning, especially in the context of online learning.

Keywords
Adult learning, female migrant workers, learning communities, online learning, salimah taiwan

Introduction
Taiwan opened the door for migrant workers to meet the workforce needs in the construction sector in 1989, and female migrant workers were allowed to work as caregivers and domestic workers. Starting from 1992, establishing a foreign labor policy marked this opening (Tseng & Wang, 2013). According to the Ministry of Labor (MOL) in Taiwan (2021), the number of migrant workers in Taiwan has steadily increased and reached 713,454 by April 2021. The majority of these workers are from Indonesia (36%), Vietnam (34%), and the Philippines (20%). As many as 75% of Indonesian workers in Taiwan are women; they work as caregivers for the elderly, sick, or disabled person placed in private households rather than medical or care institutions. Averagely 13% of Taiwanese families rely on migrant workers to care for their parents, and the higher number is in Taipei that around 31% of Taiwanese families rely on migrant workers (Lan, 2016).

However, because they are in the informal sectors, these migrant workers must work 14-18 hours per day with no regular days off and are paid far below the minimum wage. Compared to professional nurses who do the same work as migrant workers, their pay is only one-third of the professional nurse. They are expected to be on call 24 hours a day, seven days a week, and provide custodial care for the patients. In traditional Taiwanese culture, homemakers and taking care of the elders are daughter-in-law’s responsibilities. However, because they hire migrant workers frequently, all the jobs as caregivers and domestic helpers are passed on to migrant workers under various pretexts. Migrant workers are also prohibited from communicating with neighbors or strangers and are rarely allowed to leave their employers’ homes (Pan & Yang, 2012). Especially in light of the
Covid-19 pandemic, the government has officially announced a restriction on all citizens’ activities, including the migrant workers. As a result, some migrant workers who could previously take one day off per month can no longer do so.

Based on the International Organization for Migration, the emergence of migrant worker discrimination and marginalization is due to their limitations, such as a lack of skills, financial resources, networks, information, and education (International Organization for Migration, 2009; Rahmadina, 2018). Due to migrant workers’ limited mobility, many workers and student organizations provide online or offline classes for Indonesian migrant workers (PMIs; Pekerja Migran Indonesia) to meet their social reproductive needs. PMIs classes have been available since 2008 as the initiative of the Indonesian Muslim Student Association in Taiwan known as FORMMIT (Forum Mahasiswa Muslim Indonesia di Taiwan) in collaboration with KMIT (Keluarga Muslim Indonesia di Taiwan) as an umbrella organization for all Muslim associations in Taiwan. In a variety of locations based on KMIT member organizations such as MTYT (Majelis Taklim Yasinan Taipei) in Taipei, FOSMIT (Forum Silaturahmi Muslim Indonesia Taiwan) in Zhongli, IMIT (Ikatan Muslim Indonesia Taiwan) in Taichung, and the like. Indonesian workers and students in Taiwan and Taiwanese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) widely use these learning community methods. Online classes for PMIs have only been available since 2011 with KOMIT, an online learning community based on cellphone networks. According to the advancement of communication technology, online learning media for PMIs in Taiwan is becoming more diverse. The type of training provided is determined by the organization or institution that offers online classes; for example, there are Mandarin classes, English classes, Entrepreneurship classes, Quran reading classes, and even Parenting classes. The COVID-19 pandemic, which has been ravaging the world since the end of 2019, has rendered online platforms the only medium through which PMIs can remain connected and enrich themselves with various training to improve their hard and soft skills.

Learning communities for PMIs have been existed for a long time, both offline and online. However, limited literature on the subject has been discovered. Therefore, this paper aims to generate literature and discussion on online-based community learning for PMIs in Taiwan. Furthermore, the purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how crucial learning communities can be in improving life skills, meeting the need for PMIs social reproduction, and increasing life satisfaction. This paper will use the online class taught by Salimah Taiwan as a case study. Salimah Taiwan is one organization that offers online training to its members, including students, PMIs, foreign spouses, and Indonesian professionals living in Taiwan. Because PMIs constitute most Indonesians in Taiwan, it is not surprising that most participants in Salimah Taiwan’s online class are PMIs, and the classes provided are also tailored to their needs.

The concept of a learning community is based on the premise that science and knowledge are developed in diverse communities. Therefore, people with similar values and beliefs actively participate in reconstructing the experience through community interactions. This group or organization, empowered by transformative-collaborative learning activities, is a relatively autonomous entity concerned with the government, and members of the group or organization volunteer to participate (Roth & Bowen, 1995). Furthermore, it can also be defined as a joint effort by multiple groups and institutions to systematically change society to increase certain groups’ capacity, known as collaborative empowerment (Kaminskiene et al., 2020). Through this collaborative empowerment, it is hoped that the learning community will facilitate sharing knowledge and create new knowledge that can be utilized individually to benefit the community at a larger society.

Kim (2010), in his study on the learning community of migrant workers in Hong Kong and South Korea, explained four characteristics of the migrant learning community, namely we-feeling, participants autonomy and self-governance, empowering self-esteem of participants, and changes through learning.

We-feeling or a sense of solidarity develops as migrant workers share and learn about life abroad and strengthen one another in the learning community. Thus, the learning community is not only a place for learning, but it is also a place for social networking. Since migrant learning community participants and instructors are all migrant workers, participants and instructors participate voluntarily in the communities they organize. Furthermore, interactive communication with various institutions such as residents, colleagues, or neighbors, learning communities can boost the confidence and potential of migrant workers. Learning communities enable migrant workers to reconstruct their own and society’s perspectives, resulting in positive changes in their daily lives. These changes may not occur systemically but rather emerge as a result of migrants’ gradual voluntary participation.
In addition, Dodge and Kendall (2004) stated three types of learning communities, including face-to-face interaction, e-learning communities, blended learning, and collaborative communities. Face-to-face interaction is a traditional way of transferring knowledge where students and instructors meet face to face. E-learning communities are groups of people connected via technology, such as the internet, conference calls, video conferencing, and the like. They promote virtual collaboration that addresses specific issues and is supported by learning tools and online media. Finally, blended learning communities integrate face-to-face and online learning. The two core assumptions of this type of community are: (1) solid personal relations between learners to create rich collaborative learning experiences; and (2) structured group interactions with technology before and after face-to-face learning events to strengthen relationships between learners. These three types of learning communities are also used in migrant worker learning communities. The interaction takes place not only face to face interaction but also on-air and online. On-air and online interactions are available to migrant workers to compensate for their limited vacation time. Additionally, some migrants prefer to communicate on-air or online as a secondary communication channel when heavy workloads dominate the workday.

With the rapid advancement of technology, learners can study without physical presence through online learning (Alfiandri et al., 2021). The flexibility becomes the attractiveness of online learning because it allows learners to choose time, rhythm, and place compatible with their other routine responsibilities. Pandemic or not, online learning can be counted as a simple yet powerful pedagogy approach that engages learners without physical contact. Effective online learning has the potential to empower learners with confidence and autonomous learning. Learners can always study anywhere and anytime as long as they have the devices (internet and computer/cellphone).

Increasingly, adults spend time on the Internet engaged in learning something. Arghode et al. (2017) argue that none of the four learning theories (behaviorism, cognitivism, humanism, and constructivism) provides a comprehensive explanation for online adult education as each theory is contextual and its components can be utilized to improve online learning. Behaviorism learning theory learning is achieved based on external stimuli and subsequent responses that focus on knowledge acquisition.

The fruit of online pedagogy leads to massive development prolific across a wide range of discipline and group of people. According to Xiong and Zuo (2019), students enrolled in online courses need more discipline and self-motivation than those in face-to-face classes. Numerous interconnected factors can create problems for online learners, including time constraints, lack of discipline, lack of learning-management skills, and incongruence between student interest and course structure (Kauffman, 2015).

The religious non-governmental organization (RNGOs) or Faith-Based Organizations (FBOs) has a long story in the Indonesian Muslim Society. Salimah abbreviated from Bahasa Persaudaraan Muslimah that has meaning as Muslim sisterhood based on Jakarta Indonesia is one of largest Muslim Women RNGOs in Indonesia beside Aisyiyah of Muhammadiyah and Fatayat of Nahdhatul Ulama. Salimah, established on March 8th, 2000, already has branches in 33 provinces, 346 cities, 1183 districts, 285 sub-districts all over the Indonesia region, and one overseas representative in Taiwan. Its vision is to become a dynamic and robust community organization in improving the quality of life of Indonesian women, children, and families.

Salimah Taiwan as the only overseas representative of Salimah was established on April 14th, 2013, in Taipei’s Indonesian Economic and Trace Office. The members of Salimah Taiwan are from a wide range of Indonesian women in Taiwan from female migrant workers, bachelor and graduate students, expatriates, mixed married wives, and homemakers whose husbands study or work in Taiwan.

Based on the official website of Salimah (www.salimah.or.id), some crucial information about Salimah Taiwan can be accessed. Unlike Salimah in Indonesia, which has five years of the board, Salimah Taiwan changes its board annually. Based on its vision and mission, Salimah Taiwan has many activities from Islamic lecture, knowledge development, skill training, local and global issues sharing, joint-collaboration with other organizations in Indonesia and Taiwan, products and souvenirs creations, gathering, fund rising, detention center visit and many others. Salimah Taiwan is devoted to empowering Indonesian women in Taiwan that most of them are female migrant workers with knowledge and skills to build their self-awareness and self-confidence for better lives. As a representative, Salimah Taiwan’s activity was adopted from Salimah in Indonesia by adjusting to Taiwan’s circumstances. All the activities have one specific name and logo.
The name of activity usually by using abbreviation for example: (a) Sabila (Salimah Berbagi Ilmu Online), a weekly online class with various themes; (b) Gema Salimah (Gerakan membaca Al Quran bersama Salimah), an online and offline class for small group focusing to learn how to recite Al Quran; (c) KOB (Komunitas Orangtua Bijak), a parenting gathering and class; (d) BQS (Baitul Quran Salimah), a class for children; and (e) P2MB (Pos Penanggulangan Musibah dan Bencana), an charity activity for helping who are in need in the world. One of the uniqueness of Salimah Taiwan is providing activities for mixed married Indonesian ladies with Taiwanese.

Before the pandemic, Sabila and Gema Salimah online are the activities offered online. However, after the pandemic alert, the other Salimah Taiwan’s activities were also online. Sabila has a routine schedule every Saturday night from 8.30 pm to 10 pm. The class has a syllabus from Islamic studies, motivation, psychology, family, parenting, health, economics, and event celebration. The current year Sabila syllabus can be shown in Appendix A. An expert in the field delivered every topic in Sabila. In the beginning, Sabila used line group calling as its media; however, recently, the media extended to Zoom application and YouTube streaming.

Salimah Taiwan was selected as a study case in Indonesian communities in Taiwan because it has free, multi-comprehensive, and well-managed online learning. Most of the board in Salimah Taiwan are graduate students and expatriates in Taiwan who we believe have a strong management background for the organization.

**Research Method**

In order to gain a thorough qualitative understanding of the experience of women Indonesian migrant workers joining the learning community, the authors used the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. The epistemological roots of IPA are in phenomenology and hermeneutics, and the method is ideographic when every case is thoroughly examined as a single entity before it moves towards more general claims. IPA attempts to define the participants’ lived experiences and understand the ways people think about their motivations and actions. The sample sizes are small and uniform, limiting the generally acceptable results with more extensive analysis. By providing detailed accounts of individual experience, IPA research focuses on a particular group’s depth rather than the breadth.

The findings of IPA research indicate that continuous interactions will aid informants in comprehending in-depth documentation. Based on these principles, the five women as participants were purposively sampled to gather samples as uniform as possible. Each participant must have been a member of Salimah Taiwan for at least two years and participated actively. They join both offline and online learning provided by Salimah Taiwan. Our participant pseudonyms are Ani, Bella, Chika, Dona, and Eli.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews during the Salimah activities in the Taipei Grand Mosque. They joined offline activities on their day off and actively joined online classes. These women were asked to talk as broadly as possible about their reason for joining Salimah Taiwan and their online learning experience and responded to open-ended questions including their general thought about online learning, what online learning has been like for them, their reason for joining online learning, their thought on other people opinion about online learning. The interviews were designed to capture the wealth and complexity of each woman’s meaning of the online learning journey. The interviews were digitally recorded and fully transcribed.

After the flexible seven-step IPA process described by Smith et al. (2009), data analysis was carried out with a close interpretative reading of the first case where initial responses to the text were annotated in one margin. These initial notes have been translated into emerging subjects of abstraction and recorded. These themes, described below, reveal the experience of online learning among these women.

**Findings and Discussion**

In their research, Iqbal and Gusman (2015) highlighted the pull and push theory regarding the significant reasons these female migrant workers came to Taiwan [14]. They become the breadwinner for their families in Indonesia by migrating to Taiwan to pursue better future life for themselves and their families. However, studies have shown that migrant workers, especially women, face many challenges in their work overseas. The reasons can be value conflicts, language barriers, culture shocks, and everyday work-related technical problems.
These ladies need learning communities as a coping channel to share their feelings with fellow Indonesians about daily problems during their work in Taiwan and gain some knowledge and skills. The first findings explore their motivation to join online learning in Salimah Taiwan.

The self-determination theory (SDT) of Ryan and Deci (2000) is a wide range of used theories to explain an individual’s motivation for a particular behavior. Individuals can have autonomous or controlled motivation. Related to adult learning, especially learning communities, most participants have the autonomous motivation. For example, Ani was asked by the authors why she joined Salimah when she participated in one of Salimah activities in the Taipei Grand Mosque. She said that she wants to do something useful and positive during her day off. She can calm herself down and avoid doing something wasteful by going to Mosque. In Mosque, I meet the Salimah community. After that, I know Salimah provided online classes in the morning and once a week on Saturday night. When I cannot go out, I can join the online class. The other participants also mentioned a similar idea with Ani; Bella stated that she could have a new good friend from Mosque and learn the correct way to recite Quran. Eli mentioned, the first time she joined the activity in Salimah because of her friend, but later, she enjoyed all the activities offered by Salimah match with her time. She actively joined offline and online classes even after her friend had already gone back to Indonesia. Chika said she is busy with job and other positive activities because she had so many problems in her home country that she wanted to forget. She registered to Open University as student. She also joined Salimah and other organizations’ activities. Eli said she enjoyed the togetherness with other Indonesian Muslim fellows. She want to learn many things in Salimah, especially her religion because she only has limited time to go Mosque. She felt lonely because there was only her and the grandpa she take care of at the employer’s house.

After exploring the initial motivation why the join Salimah, the analysis shows some of their attempts to explore to the online environment, then five major themes were identified: (1) These learners could improve their knowledge and skills without leaving their employer’s house; (2) They established relationship with new online friends because they felt many similarities in terms of gender, country origin, and religion; (3) These ladies had the chance to share their feelings, thoughts, and ideas and receive information, answers or alternatives of their problems or issues; (4) Joining online learning communities could reduce their loneliness; and (5) These women were motivated to be a better version of themselves because they thought so did everyone in the community. Each theme was intrinsically interwoven and pivotal to adult learning, especially in the context of online learning. These themes are presented below, with illustrative extracts.

These Learners Could Improve Their Knowledge and Skills without Leaving the House of Their Employer
The first theme encapsulates the self-fulfillment of these female migrant workers in the development of their knowledge and skills during online learning. These ladies only have a one-day vacation once a month. They think that only go to the nearest Southeast Asia gathering place in every train station in every Taiwan’s big cities is wasteful. Eli said if she went shopping or ate some Indonesian culinary costs a lot of money. She instead save it for her kids’ education. The current situation of the Covid-19 outbreak in Taiwan forced her to stay at home and cannot go to Mosque, and the online class is still there. The online learning has become a solution to solve pandemics’ teaching/learning strategies (Lopes & McKay, 2020).

The Salimah online class lecturers and board staffs play a central role in improving their knowledge and skills. The lecturers are experts in their fields, and the Salimah board personnel always try their best to serve the Salimah members. The staff responded with enthusiasm to any questions or problems concerning the online class or other issues.

They Established Relationship with New Online Friends because They Felt Many Similarities among Them in Terms of Gender, Country Origin, and Religion
Participants revealed how important it is to interact with other learners to provide a support network. These women felt comfortable revealing their real identity because they found Salimah their own home. Some of the online class contents were related to their circumstances. Spontaneously, they honestly trusted and confided in their situations without feeling prejudiced. Not all of their problems have immediate solutions, but they can calm down. Their calm mental state has a very positive impact on their independence process to find solutions. The human interaction and sincerity associated with the organization meant that participants felt they interacted with...
their own sisters. Ani said it is like a home for her. She can meet with other Indonesian fellows who are like her. The social construction still is created among learners in online learning (Cheng, 2016).

These Ladies Had the Chance to Share Their Feelings, Thoughts, and Ideas and Receive Information, Answers, or Alternatives of Their Problems or Issues

Participants actively sought to establish their identity as members within the community by comparing themselves to others. These comparisons often gave participants a sense that they can do it [positive achievement] like everyone else. They sometimes felt that other learners, administrative staff, or even lecturers were more qualified or experienced. However, they were not felt ashamed or insecure. A theory said that women have a daily need to express their feeling or thought. The study of the online course in Chen (2014) revealed that men focused more on competitive aspects of the course with the terms progress, while women viewed virtual school as a collaborative and networking opportunity and appreciated the collaborative environment.

Joining Online Learning Communities Could Reduce Their Loneliness

The fourth theme was coping with their lack of interaction with the same friend from the same country. This online environment fills the void of their lack of social interaction, even only hearing the voice and seeing the video. Participants indirectly decreased their everyday struggles to adjust to strange environments, feelings of frustration, and uncertainty. The language barrier made them often reluctant to communicate using their mother language during online learning. Their accounts reveal their attempts to cope with these everyday difficulties and strategies to overcome them (Walker, 2017).

These women were motivated to be a better version of themselves because they thought so did everyone in the community

She thinks that working in Taiwan will provide her plenty of time. In fact, she cannot go out. However, she became motivated to be a better person. Chika said that since she has joined the activities in Salimah, she thinks she has become a better person. She learned from others and reflected on her experience. She thinks her attitude has become better and calmer now. The learning community served as an empowering arena among these migrant workers. Eli said she liked to write and recite a poem, and Salimah provided her opportunities to show her talent. They were inspired by all the people they encountered in the organization. An individual has more encouragement to succeed when she or he is in a positive community (Ziegler et al., 2014).

Conclusion

This article has demonstrated an insightful understanding of online learning experiences among these female migrant workers. It has been suggested that adult online learning is a beneficial way of learning – it helps learners develop knowledge, skills, and the like what they saw or listened to, encouraging discipline and rigor in thought during the learning process and communication. They also establish relationships with other students. Our findings echo previous work that has discussed the importance of identity in online learning practices among adults. It highlighted the uniqueness of online learning to solve the difficulties of face-to-face learning because of the many circumstances they had. The interaction means for them to fulfill their daily communication needs and cultivate trust.

Sometimes the interaction via chat in the group chats in Line Apps gives them a quick chat to ask for news, waiting for important information (currently the latest information about the pandemic), then quick answers to questions about everyday life. This chat interaction also positively affects their interactions and ability to establish relationships with other learners and board (needs to be explained above again, if the administrators also have to guide members). It leads to a sense of social support and minimizes their isolation struggled to adjust and cope in Taiwan. Additionally, the Salimah Taiwan board may be seen as genuine individuals to establish a trustworthy relationship.

Previous work has suggested that anxiety levels are high in novice migrant workers overseas as they learn how to adapt to new and strange environments but gradually decrease as they become more familiar with the circumstance and establish abilities to cope with everyday life. Eli’s experience as a novice migrant worker in Taiwan gives insight into this challenging process as her anxiety escalates to feelings of bewilderment and frustration as he struggles to project her own identity and understand others.
The notion that everybody on the line group could respond to them as a warm thing. These feelings of talking to someone like their own families’ findings support the pedagogical enthusiasm among them. This perceived honesty and openness fueled their easiness. To enhance more interaction, the Salimah Taiwan board needs to open more opportunities for learners to participate and be a recipient actively.

References


