



DISTANCE LEARNING IN DEVELOPING INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS' ENGLISH-SPEAKING SKILLS OF PKBM PPI TAIWAN

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Abstract: This research explores the practices of distance learning in enhancing English speaking skills among migrant workers at the Community Learning Center (PKBM-PPI) in Taiwan. The research purpose is to understand how remote educational strategies are tailored to meet the unique needs of migrant workers, who often face challenges such as irregular work schedules and limited access to educational resources. Using a mixed-methods approach, the study combines quantitative data from pre- and post-course assessments with qualitative insights from participant interviews and instructor feedback. Key findings indicate that the integration of technology, such as mobile learning applications and online discussion forums, significantly improves learners' engagement and speaking proficiency. Additionally, the flexibility of distance learning programs allows workers to balance their educational pursuits with occupational demands. The study concludes that well-structured distance learning initiatives, supported by interactive and accessible content, can effectively develop English speaking skills among migrant workers, contributing to their personal and professional growth. The findings provide valuable insights for educators and policymakers aiming to implement effective language learning programs in similar contexts.

Keywords: *Distance learning, speaking proficiency, migrant workers*

INTRODUCTION

Global labor migration continues to redefine the educational needs of mobile populations, especially among low-skilled workers from Southeast Asia. Indonesia, as one of the largest labor-exporting countries in the region, contributes significantly to the foreign workforce in Taiwan. Indonesian migrant workers are employed in caregiving, domestic services, and industrial sectors where language barriers present daily challenges. While their economic role is undeniable, their linguistic marginalization remains a major constraint to career advancement and social integration (Hedman & Fisher, 2025; Vassallo, 2024). Prior research has shown that expectations for rapid linguistic assimilation often occur without sufficient educational scaffolding (Migliarini & Cioè-Peña, 2024; Maqsood et al., 2024). This exclusionary tendency positions

language not only as a communication tool but also as a gatekeeper of opportunity (Martin et al., 2024).

The rhetoric of inclusion in host countries rarely translates into pedagogical reality for migrants. Although many national education systems claim to promote equity, the lived experience of migrant learners often reveals systemic rigidity. In France and New Zealand, for instance, mainstream classrooms fail to accommodate the language needs of newly arrived students (Smythe, 2024; Chen & Buckingham, 2024). Teachers' relational agency is increasingly recognized as critical in navigating these tensions (Kim & Kang, 2024; Buchert et al., 2024). However, relying solely on individual educators without systemic support leads to uneven educational outcomes (Pantić et al., 2024). What remains lacking is an ecosystem that aligns institutional structures, teacher agency, and learner context.

In both physical and digital spaces, migrant workers face pervasive language-based discrimination, which limits their access to training, advancement, and belonging. These barriers are compounded in multilingual environments where workplace hierarchies privilege dominant languages (Back & Piekkari, 2024; Nigar & Kostogriz, 2024). Intercultural and sensory literacies have been proposed as solutions, yet implementation remains inconsistent (Kim & Kang, 2024; Fernández-Corbacho et al., 2024). For female migrants in particular, the intersection of language, gender, and emotional wellbeing creates complex vulnerability (Isik & Birmek, 2025). Language education must therefore attend not only to functional proficiency but also to emotional safety and cultural affirmation. Failure to do so risks reproducing systems of exclusion under the guise of skill development.

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the mainstreaming of distance learning, opening up educational possibilities for time-constrained adults. Migrants, especially those juggling work and irregular hours, can benefit from the flexibility and autonomy afforded by online platforms (Walldén, 2024; Essa et al., 2024). Emerging technologies—ranging from generative AI to virtual reality—present new avenues for multimodal, interactive instruction (Creely et al., 2025; Kostoulas, 2024). Research from embodied pedagogy and performative teaching further shows that experiential learning can improve language retention among migrants (Piazzoli & Dalziel, 2024; Liu, 2025). These insights push us to consider distance learning not as a technical solution, but as a socio-pedagogical shift that demands a rethinking of design, delivery, and discourse.

The theoretical foundations of this study rest on two key paradigms: Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Needs-Based Curriculum Design. Both emphasize the learner's context, purpose, and participation in shaping language instruction. Studies in Korea and New Zealand highlight how social roles and lived experiences shape migrant learners' engagement with English (Cho, 2025; Shen & Choi, 2024). For older learners, English acquisition intersects with past educational traumas, self-perception, and digital anxiety (Chen & Buckingham, 2025; Boothe, 2024). Indonesian cases demonstrate the need to localize curriculum through cultural narratives and occupational relevance (Yundayani et al., 2025). Therefore, a purely skills-based approach is insufficient; pedagogy must be transformative,

dialogic, and attuned to learners' positionalities (Susanto et al., 2024).

Innovative instructional strategies have started to address these multidimensional needs. Gamified platforms and multiplatform delivery have improved retention rates among foreign language learners in Southeast Asia (Irfan & Arifin, 2025; Fahzaria et al., 2024). However, these must be guided by robust needs analysis, a process that identifies learners' motivations, constraints, and communication contexts (Putri & Santoso, 2024; Mahendra et al., 2024). Legal insecurity continues to threaten the continuity of learning for many migrants, particularly those in informal sectors or undocumented positions (Earlyana & Aung, 2025). Without policy protection and psychosocial support, even the most innovative programs remain fragile. Therefore, effective language education for migrants must be both pedagogically grounded and structurally safeguarded.

In countries like Malaysia and South Korea, research emphasizes the critical role of intercultural communicative competence in migrant language learning. Indonesian workers in these regions report barriers not only in comprehension but in pragmatic fluency across diverse workplaces (Kuswandi et al., 2024; Chaudhary et al., 2024). Real-world language tasks—such as filling medical forms or explaining technical instructions—require functional, contextualized instruction (Ko et al., 2025; Mulyanah et al., 2024). Social media platforms like TikTok have even been leveraged to teach pronunciation and idiomatic expressions (Mohamad et al., 2024; Ibnu et al., 2024). While creative, such tools require integration into a structured curriculum to ensure coherence, progression, and meaningful assessment.

Post-pandemic educational reconstruction must address the digital divide that disproportionately affects migrant populations. Indonesian workers abroad often lack reliable access to devices, connectivity, or digital fluency, which hinders full engagement in online education (Djatmika et al., 2024; Duraisingam et al., 2024). Successful models from Singapore and Japan show that translanguaging and cultural mediation can bridge linguistic gaps and affirm learner identity (Virk, 2025; Srimulyani & Lim Fui Yee, 2024). Informal education centers and community-based instruction have also proven effective, particularly when they position learners as knowledge holders and active participants (Suwanda et al., 2024; Wisnujati et al., 2024). Thus, educational equity

must be redefined not merely as access to content, but access to meaning-making.

PKBM PPI Taiwan exemplifies a promising community-based initiative aimed at serving Indonesian migrant workers' educational needs. Yet, there remains a research gap on how distance learning can be operationalized to develop English speaking proficiency in this specific setting. Studies suggest that interactive materials, real-life themes, and peer collaboration can improve learner engagement (Awary et al., 2024; Arum, 2024). Moreover, adult learners tend to invest more effort when instruction aligns with workplace needs and personal growth goals (Sari et al., 2024; Nun & Armin, 2025). Children of migrant workers, too, face challenges in acquiring English without adequate home or school support (Alamsyah et al., 2025; Lestari et al., 2024). These intersecting factors underscore the urgency of designing inclusive, flexible, and needs-responsive learning models.

Given this background, the present study addresses a critical gap in the literature: How can distance learning be designed to enhance English speaking skills among Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan? Grounded in communicative pedagogy and needs-based curriculum, the research explores the effects of flexible scheduling, contextualized instruction, and self-learning materials (Arum, 2024; Sari et al., 2024). It also investigates the technological and socio-emotional barriers that hinder engagement and retention. How do learners navigate online platforms while balancing their demanding work schedules? What role does curriculum design play in sustaining motivation and communicative confidence? These questions are explored through an inductive, qualitative lens grounded in migrant experiences (Nun & Armin, 2025).

This study contributes both theoretically and practically to the fields of migrant education, digital pedagogy, and language teaching. By offering empirical insights into a successful community learning model in Taiwan, it provides a replicable framework for migrant-focused English instruction (Alamsyah et al., 2025). The integration of needs analysis, communicative teaching, and mobile accessibility demonstrates how pedagogy can be responsive without sacrificing rigor (Lestari et al., 2024). Ultimately, the study argues that distance learning—when rooted in empathy, relevance, and co-agency—can serve as a vehicle for equity and empowerment in transnational labor contexts (Alamsyah et al., 2025).

METHOD

Scientific publications, bibliographic indexes, and databases like Scopus, Science Direct, Research Gate, and the Web of Science were the primary and secondary sources used in this research. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the effectiveness of post-pandemic distance learning. Qualitative descriptive research aims to provide a comprehensive summary of a phenomenon, capturing participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives in their own words. This approach is particularly suited to our research objectives, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the topic without imposing theoretical interpretations on the data (Creswell, 2009).

The data was collected through questionnaires and focus group discussions. Semi-structured interviews were also conducted individually with each participant to explore their perceptions and experiences with their English skills and distance learning. Interview guides were developed to cover topics such as the perceived opportunities, challenges, and impact of distance learning on teaching and learning practices (Zhang & Gillespie, 2023). Additionally, focus group discussions were organized to facilitate group interactions and generate collective insights on the research topic. Participants were grouped according to their stakeholder category (i.e., educators, students, collaborators), with each focus group consisting of four to six participants. Discussions were moderated by the research team and guided by predetermined discussion prompts.



Figure 1. *Qualitative research method (Ugwu, Chinyere. N. and Eze Val, 2017)*

This research did not establish explicit research questions at the beginning of the study since qualitative research is frequently exploratory and doing so may force their framework onto the research context. It began the study with only a research purpose and conceptual framework, and a sense of the initial focus of interest. They then

prefer to enter the research setting, become familiar with the context and the participants, and ascertain what participants think the main issues and problems are, before determining their specific research questions. These questions are modified and refined, and the research design is developed, as their understandings of the research setting, participants, and research focus mature (Obeyd, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The need for mastery of English skills by Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan has been increasing due to the great professional or career development opportunities offered by its mastery. Nevertheless, enhancing English proficiency for Indonesian migrant workers, particularly in Taiwan is still challenging for several reasons. Responding to the challenges, a distance learning program was conducted. According to Frank (2008) and Lowenthal, et. al. (2021), distance learning is defined as an instructional system in which the teacher and students are physically separated by space and sometimes time. This instructional design allows the teaching-learning program to occur even though the teacher and students are not on the same site. This research aimed to reveal the practices of distance learning for developing Indonesian migrant workers' English skills.

In conducting this research, several steps were taken. The first step was a survey. The survey was conducted by interviewing the headmaster of the learning center of PPI Taiwan and distributing questionnaires to the Indonesian migrant workers who are students of the learning center. These steps were conducted at the beginning of the program to identify the student's background, the student's English proficiency levels, the needs of the student's English speaking skills, and their condition to join the distance learning. Based on the survey, it was found that the majority of the migrant workers are graduates of Junior High School level who have been pursuing their Senior High School level. Apart from pursuing their education at the learning center of PPI Taiwan, they are also caregivers who mostly work until 8 PM Taiwan time. According to the data, it was found that 12 % of participants' English proficiency level was elementary while the rest of 88% of the participants' English proficiency level was beginner. Starting from the data obtained from the preliminary research, several points were decided to optimize the practices of distance learning for improving Indonesian migrant

workers' English-speaking skills. The points are 1) adjusting the virtual meeting application and the learning time; 2) developing a needs analysis-based curriculum; 3) implementing a communicative approach to develop migrant workers' speaking skills; 4) providing self-learning materials; and 5) evaluating the process.

Since the students of the learning center who became the participants of this research are workers in Taiwan, this learning project was decided to be conducted using a virtual communication method. According to Yi, Y & Moon, R.H (2021), virtual communication methods involve the use of technology such as video telephony and communication systems that allow virtual meetings or meetings that are carried out from a distance, without any physical contact or movement. Hence, a virtual meeting application named Google Meet was selected due to its accessibility. The majority of the participants were only capable of utilizing this application. Thus, GoogleMeet was chosen to ease the learning process as referring to the function, technology should accommodate the needs of students' learning. It was in line with Özudogru (2021) who stated that technology allows the personalization of learning experiences that can fulfill individual student needs and learning styles, potentially leading to better outcomes. The virtual communication method not only allows the distance learning process but also allows the time flexibility of the learning process. Considering the working time of the participants, the learning time of this program was adjusted to be conducted at night after their working time so that it could accommodate their needs without having to leave their duties. Even though the learning time was adjusted, it was revealed that few participants had to participate in the class from their work and even interrupted the learning process due to the duty they had to do. Nevertheless, they were all very enthusiastic to participate in the learning process despite any disturbance during their participation.

Developing needs analysis-based curriculum

The next part of this program was developing a curriculum that was suitable for the individual needs of the participants. Starting from the basic assumptions that the curriculum development should take the analysis of learners' needs into account, the development of this program curriculum was initially conducted by collecting information about the learners' or participants' needs, which is called needs analysis. Needs analysis was stated by Richard, J.K (2001) as a

significant phase of an educational programs plan since the 1960s as it was part of the curriculum development system approach and educational accountability philosophy.

The needs analysis in this program was conducted by interviewing the head of the PPI Learning Center in Taiwan and distributing questionnaires to the participants' candidates. Some questions were administered involving the students' educational background, occupation, previous history of learning English, English proficiency level, motivation to learn English, and availability to participate in this program. The data requirement was in line with some of the concepts of needs stated by Valle, A. B. (2016) that needs in this case refer to demands, motivations, goals, wishes, requirements, constraints, preferences, and communicative situations. The needs analysis process in this program was executed qualitatively. Valle, A. B. (2016) said that needs can be collected and analyzed using quantitative or qualitative and inductive or deductive methods.

The program that was conducted in eight meetings was designed based on topics or themes. This was also known as thematic curriculum. The thematic curriculum was defined by Finch, C.R. et. al. (1997) as "a set of organized learning experiences such as programs, courses, and other school-sponsored activities that provide students with exposure to a broad, predominant content theme". It was in accordance with the needs analysis result indicating the migrant workers' tendency in using English for supporting their daily life communication. To accommodate their needs, several topics or themes that were considered essential for their communication were selected. This selection took the daily life contexts into account. It was in line with the theory stated by Finch, C.R. et. al. (1997) that the consideration of context is an essential aspect in developing a thematic curriculum. Context would help students to relate to the materials taught which would result in more effective material comprehension.

Implementing communicative approach to develop migrant workers' speaking skills

Considering the goals of this learning program in developing migrant workers' English-speaking skills, it was decided to employ a communicative approach in the teaching-learning process. The Communicative approach or Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) is an approach that emphasizes meaningful communication and interaction in teaching languages (Loumbordy, L, 2018). Hence, the students or participants were

encouraged to be exposed to and practice communication in different contexts. By providing students with a real communicative context, the students would have more opportunities to exchange information in which the communication occurred, so any students' communicative competence including languages would emerge to the situation (Toro, V, et. al, 2018).

There were six meetings with different topics taught by an instructor in each class for every meeting. The objective of every lesson was to enable students to talk about certain topics in the context of daily life. As the focus of the program was speaking skills, the lesson in every meeting was planned to provide students with more speaking practice. After being equipped with the vocabulary and expressions needed, the students were drilled to pronounce the vocabulary and expressions correctly and appropriately. However, all of them were conducted by previously eliciting the students to say so. This was to keep the students centered. This was then enhanced by the speaking practices which allowed the students to practice their English communication skills. This finding was in accordance with a theory proposed by Richards and Rodgers (2014) regarding three elements of the communicative approach. The elements are 1) the communication principle which focuses on implementing real communication; 2) the task principle which focuses on utilizing language to carry out meaningful tasks; and 3) the meaningfulness principle which emphasizes meaningful learning. The teaching and learning process in this program attempted to consider the three elements of the communicative approach as previously explained to achieve the learning objectives optimally. As a result, based on the observation and interview with some students or participants, it was revealed that students' confidence in speaking English was highly improved due to the frequent English exposure and practice they got. Additionally, their speaking skills also developed quite well.

Apart from that, this program was participated in by two classes which each consisted of 25 participants. The participants were Indonesian migrant workers originating from different cultures and areas in Indonesia and working in different areas in Taiwan. The fact that they were from diverse cultural backgrounds in Indonesia and various recent working areas in Taiwan allows the students to have wider ideas and enhance their cross-cultural communication skills. This thing surely supports the positive impacts of the communicative approach.

Providing self-learning materials

This distance learning program was undeniably constrained by limitations. The limitations were due to some aspects, such as lack of learning program duration, lack of students' focus, and lack of students' monitoring. First, the learning program duration was limited as it was only a short program of community service overseas and could be only conducted virtually. Second, there was a lack of student focus as many participants still had to work during the learning program time. Third, the previous two limitation aspects resulted in a lack of student monitoring. The student's progress in English speaking skills could not be optimally monitored because of the physical absence of the instructor and students in place.

To anticipate the aforementioned problems, the students were provided with self-learning materials that could be reviewed by them outside the learning program schedule. In addition, there was a chatting room of a WhatsApp group that enabled the students or participants to ask, consult, or discuss with the instructors and peers. In this case, self-learning materials were used as media that could represent the real teachers/instructors when the students were away or outside the learning program time. Patel, H. & Singh, S. (2022) asserted that self-learning material facilitates distance learners to have the same learning experiences as a student in a classroom and could even help them to learn independently. On the point of that, providing self-learning materials was significant for the students of distance learning.

Providing assessment and evaluation

To ensure the students' speaking skills development, assessment and evaluation were executed. Assessment and evaluation were critical parts of the teaching-learning process that could not be neglected and left. Assessment refers to the process of collecting data regarding what students can do, while evaluation is the process that follows this data collection, including the process of analysis, reflection, and decisions to make for the student's future progress according to the data (Meidasari, V.E., 2015). Hence, the assessment was conducted during and at the end of the teaching-learning process. The purpose of this assessment was to see the students' speaking skills development during and after the process of treatment. The assessment of students' speaking skills tried to focus on how the students can interact or communicate in certain contexts with good comprehension and fluency, sufficient vocabulary,

and accurate grammar as well as pronunciation. It was in line with Nunan (1999) in Rahmawati, Y & Ertin (2014) who viewed speaking as a skill that requires linguistic competence such as pronunciation, vocabulary, and grammar, strategic competence that refers to the use of various strategic ways to overcome the communication barriers, and sociolinguistic/ cultural competence that requires the speakers to use the language appropriately according to the context.

CONCLUSION

Indonesian migrant workers constitute a considerable segment of Taiwan's labor force, contributing to its economy while supporting their families in Indonesia. Over time, they have become integral to Taiwanese society, engaging in diverse occupations and industries. Mastery of the English language presents a significant opportunity for Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. Unfortunately, most Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan possess only basic English skills. Acknowledging the pivotal role of English proficiency, the introduction of distance learning initiatives emerges as a promising solution. Well-designed curriculum and interactive learning modules cater to the specific needs and constraints of migrant workers, enabling them to learn at their own pace and convenience. In the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, which emphasized the significance of remote learning, there is an opportunity to leverage distance education in addressing the educational needs of Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan. However, amidst the opportunities, challenges such as technological barriers and cultural sensitivities need to be navigated to ensure the effectiveness and inclusivity of post-pandemic distance learning initiatives for this vulnerable demographic.

Indonesian migrant workers in Taiwan often face significant barriers due to limited access to technology and unreliable internet connectivity. This digital disparity impedes their ability to engage effectively in online learning programs aimed at improving English proficiency, thus hindering their prospects of accessing better employment opportunities and advancing their careers. Another issue pertains to the inadequacy of support infrastructure and guidance mechanisms for Indonesian migrant workers participating in distance learning endeavors. By internet access, students have access to a wealth of resources beyond what may be available in traditional classrooms, including online libraries, educational websites, and multimedia content. Distance

learning breaks down geographical barriers, enabling students to access education from institutions worldwide. In fact, not all students have equal access to reliable internet connections and necessary devices, creating a digital divide that exacerbates educational inequality.

Distance learning may lead to feelings of isolation and a lack of social interaction, which are crucial for holistic development and peer-learning. Post-pandemic distance learning holds great potential to revolutionize education by offering flexibility, access to resources, and innovative teaching methods.

The research was conducted to give English training especially for migrant workers in Taiwan. Distance learning platforms facilitate access to courses and materials from institutions around the world. Distance learning fosters collaboration among students from different parts of the world. Students could build global networks of peers, educators, and professionals. The primary premise is that capabilities are constructed using a standard set of technological features and tool functionality.

This online collaborative model is described as a process or action that researchers must do to assist students in algorithms and programming courses in learning in groups, participating, interacting, and cooperatively completing a task. This indicates that the use of technology adds more variables to the mix when it comes to developing learning experiences and teaching methods. Limited immediate feedback in distance learning refers to the challenge of providing timely and personalized feedback to students due to the asynchronous nature of online education and the lack of face-to-face interaction between students and instructors. By this phase, instructors may have limited time to provide feedback to each student individually, especially in courses with large enrollments. Furthermore, some digital platforms used for distance learning may have cumbersome feedback processes, requiring instructors to navigate multiple steps or interfaces to provide feedback on student work.

This complexity can slow down the feedback cycle and contribute to delays in response times. Without physical access to labs, workshops, or studios, students may miss out on the chance to develop practical skills and apply theoretical knowledge in real-world contexts. This limitation could hinder their ability to compete in the job market or pursue further studies in specialized fields. Scientific publications, bibliographic indexes, and databases like Scopus, Science Direct, ResearchGate, and the Web of Science were

among the primary and secondary sources used in this research. This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the opportunities and challenges associated with the effectiveness of post-pandemic distance learning. Qualitative Research Method (Ugwu, Chinyere. and Eze Val, 2017). It began the study with only a research purpose and conceptual framework, and a sense of the initial focus of interest. They then prefer to enter the research setting and become familiar with the context and the participants, and ascertain what participants think the main issues and problems are, before determining their specific research questions.

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