

# The Role of Teachers in Overcoming Multicultural Learning Challenges for Immigrant Children (Case Study at Sungai Mulia 5 Guidance Studio, Gombak, Malaysia)

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to analyze the role of teachers in addressing the challenges of multicultural learning among Indonesian migrant children at Sanggar Bimbingan Sungai Mulia 5 (SBSM 5), Gombak, Malaysia. Employing a qualitative approach with field research methods, the study is framed within the Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD) model. Data were collected through participant observation, in-depth interviews with the teacher (Bu Masruah), interactions with students, and supporting documentation. The findings reveal that the teacher plays multiple roles: as a cultural mediator, an emotional facilitator, and a connector between migrant children, the community, and external institutions. These roles enhance students' engagement, motivation, and sense of belonging, although structural barriers such as legal status, limited funding, and the lack of formal recognition from local authorities persist. The study concludes that strengthening teachers' capacity, securing formal recognition of learning centres, and fostering cross-sector collaboration are crucial for the sustainability of multicultural education for migrant children. Future research should explore cross-national collaborative strategies to strengthen inclusive alternative education models.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of international migration has major consequences for children's basic rights, one of which is access to education. Migrant children often face structural barriers such as unclear legal status, family economic limitations, and social discrimination that limits their participation in formal schooling. In many destination countries, including Malaysia, migrant children are often not recognized in the national education system and are therefore dependent on community learning centers or non-formal institutions. This condition causes educational disparities that have implications for low academic achievement, limited social mobility, and long-term marginalization. Therefore, the existence of community-based education alternatives is very urgent to answer their needs, while encouraging the creation of inclusive learning spaces that can accommodate the diversity of languages, cultures, and life experiences of migrant children (Kenney, 2020).

In the context of Malaysia, this situation is increasingly complex because the country is one of the main destinations for Indonesian migrant workers, especially in the construction, plantation, and domestic sectors. Children from migrant families are often born or raised without official documents such as birth certificates or residence permits, preventing them from accessing formal schools that require administrative legality. This condition causes many migrant children to face the risk of dropping out of school, lack of basic literacy skills, and social isolation in their living environment. In response to these limitations, the Indonesian community together with PKBM under the auspices of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur established non-formal learning centers, one of which is the Sungai Mulia 5 Guidance Studio (SBSM 5). This studio not only provides an alternative learning space, but also becomes a forum for strengthening the cultural and social identity of migrant children so that they still feel that they have a place in the educational process even though they are outside the formal system (Loganathan dkk., 2023).

The existence of a studio such as SBSM 5 does not necessarily eliminate the learning challenges faced by migrant children. The diversity of their language, culture, and social experiences creates complex classroom dynamics. Some children are more fluent in regional languages than Indonesian, while others have to adjust to the cultural differences brought by their peers. This condition often causes a gap in understanding, low participation, and the emergence of a sense of inferiority. In addition, the social stigma of being a "migrant child" and the psychological distress caused by longing for busy working parents also affect their involvement in learning. This situation demands an adaptive multicultural pedagogical approach, which is a learning model that not only teaches academic material, but also respects the diversity of children's identities, fosters confidence, and creates an inclusive classroom where every child feels recognized and empowered (Karanikola, 2025).

In dealing with the diversity of identities of migrant children, teachers have a very strategic position because their role goes beyond their traditional function as a transmitter of knowledge. Teachers are required to be cultural mediators who are able to bridge differences in language, customs, and social experiences brought by students into the classroom. In addition, teachers also function as emotional facilitators by providing psychosocial support so that migrant children feel safe, valued, and motivated to learn. No less important, teachers play the role of social liaisons (*social broker*) that connect children to community resources, non-formal educational institutions, and other social networks that can expand their learning opportunities. With this multifunctional role, teachers not only teach academic skills, but also form confidence and positive identities in migrant children who are vulnerable to marginalization (Akin-Sabuncu et al., 2024a).

The urgency of this research lies in the urgent need to understand how teachers can address the challenges of multicultural learning in the context of socially and legally vulnerable migrant children. The role of teachers in SBSM 5 becomes very significant because teachers not only deal with limited educational resources, but also have to navigate the complex diversity of languages, cultures, and emotional states of students. In this situation, teachers are required to design inclusive learning strategies, harnessing the potential of the community as supporters, while countering the stigma of marginalization inherent in the status of migrant children. Thus, this research has an important value for strengthening the academic discourse on multicultural education, while making a practical contribution to improving the quality of non-formal learning in migrant communities (Akinlar dkk., 2023).

The Sungai Mulia 5 Guidance Studio (SBSM 5) in Gombak, Malaysia, is a real example of how community-based education is present to fill the gap in access to formal education for Indonesian migrant children. The existence of this studio is relevant because it is able to provide an alternative learning space that focuses not only on knowledge transfer, but also on identity formation, emotional support, and strengthening social solidarity among migrant children. In practice, teachers at SBSM 5 play a central role in facilitating a multicultural learning process, starting from language adaptation, child empowerment as peer tutors, to collaboration with PKBM and local communities. This makes SBSM 5 an appropriate location to examine the role of teachers in the context of community-based non-

formal education, as well as make an empirical contribution to academic studies on migrant education in Southeast Asia (Abdurahman Siswanto et al., 2025).

Based on the context and relevance of the research in SBSM 5, the main objective of this study is to analyze in depth how teachers play a role in overcoming multicultural learning challenges for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia using a framework *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD). The focus of the research is directed at teachers' strategies in three main domains, namely: first, as cultural mediators who are able to bridge differences in language and social background; second, as an emotional facilitator who provides psychological support and builds learning motivation; and third, as a social liaison that connects children with PKBM, communities, and further education opportunities. By examining these aspects, this study is expected not only to enrich the academic literature on community-based multicultural education, but also to provide practical recommendations for strengthening non-formal education models in migrant environments (Adolph Groenewald, 2024).

## 2. METHOD

This type of research is Qualitative with the Field research (*field research*). Field procedures include observation of participants in the studio room, in-depth interviews with one of the representatives of the studio teacher, Mrs. Masruah, interviews and direct interaction with the child's subjects as well as the collection of supporting documents (activity schedules, simple learning modules, and activity notes). The qualitative approach was chosen because it was able to explore the subjective experiences of migrant children and the dynamics of social interaction that occur in non-formal learning spaces. Qualitative research is considered effective for understanding the socio-cultural context of multicultural education because it emphasizes meaning and interpretation rather than just statistical numbers (Dr. Abdul Fattah Nasution, M.Pd, 2023).

This research was carried out at the Sungai Mulia 5 Guidance Studio (SBSM 5), which is located in Gombak, Malaysia, an area with a fairly high population of Indonesian migrant workers. This studio functions as a non-formal learning center under the auspices of the PKBM of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur, which provides access to basic education for migrant children who cannot attend formal institutions due to limited legal documents. The research subjects consisted of one main teacher, namely Mrs. Masruah, who was fully responsible for teaching and learning activities, as well as Indonesian migrant children from various backgrounds of age, language, and region of origin. These children are important subjects because they represent a diversity of learning experiences while facing distinctive multicultural challenges. The selection of subjects was carried out purposively with the consideration that the teacher and the children are direct actors in the dynamics of studio learning, so that the data obtained can describe the reality of interactions, pedagogical strategies, and multicultural challenges that arise in daily practice. The focus on primary teachers and students allows researchers to capture authentic experiences from both sides that play an important role in this community-based education process (Mustaffa dkk., 2022). Based on an interview with Mrs. Masruah, the effective teaching patterns applied include the use of a mixture of Indonesian and regional languages, the empowerment of older children as peer tutors, and the implementation of a warm and participatory learning atmosphere so that children feel emotionally safe. These patterns are seen as important to minimize language barriers, build solidarity, and increase the learning motivation of migrant children who are prone to marginalization (Vromans et al., 2023).

To obtain a comprehensive picture of learning patterns in SBSM 5, data was collected through several techniques, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews, focused conversations, and documentation studies. Participant observation was carried out directly by participating in learning activities in the classroom, recording the interaction between Mrs. Masruah and the children, group dynamics, language use, and pedagogical strategies practiced, such as peer tutoring methods and the combination of Indonesian and regional languages (Caingcoy, 2023). The in-depth interview focused on Ms. Masruah to explore her experiences, the multicultural strategies she has applied, and the challenges faced in teaching diverse migrant children. In addition, focused conversations were

conducted with small groups of studio children in an informal setting to find out their perceptions of learning comfort, language barriers, and the emotional support they received. Meanwhile, the documentation study includes an analysis of simple modules used in learning activities, the studio's daily schedule, as well as regular activity notes that reflect the consistency of the learning program. This combination of techniques allows researchers to obtain richer, more in-depth, and complementary data on multicultural education practices in SBSM 5 (Dr. Abdul Fattah Nasution, M.Pd, 2023).

In line with the selection of research subjects in SBSM 5, data was collected through a combination of techniques designed to capture the realities of daily learning in depth, namely participant observation, in-depth interviews, focused conversations, and documentation studies. Participant observation was carried out by participating in learning activities in the classroom, recording communication patterns between Mrs. Masruah and the children, the teaching strategies used such as peer tutoring and the use of mixed language, as well as group dynamics in a non-formal learning atmosphere. The in-depth interview was directed at Mrs. Masruah as the main teacher to explore an understanding of multicultural pedagogical strategies, how to deal with language barriers, and efforts to build emotional closeness with students (Akin-Sabuncu et al., 2024b). On the other hand, focused conversations were conducted with small groups of migrant children in an informal setting so that they could more freely share their learning experiences, difficulties faced, and forms of support they felt. To strengthen the field data, the documentation study was carried out by analyzing the simple modules used by the teacher, the schedule of routine activities, and the internal records of the studio that showed the teaching patterns and involvement of the children. This triangulation approach is seen as important to ensure that the data collected is not only descriptively rich, but also valid in describing multicultural learning practices in migrant community settings (Arinto, 2024).

Once the data is obtained through observation, interviews, focused conversations, and documentation, the analysis is carried out using a framework *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD). This approach was chosen because it is considered most relevant for understanding non-formal education practices in migrant communities that often face more limitations than opportunities. In contrast to the problem-based approach (*problem-driven*) which tends to highlight shortcomings, ABCD focuses on the potential and assets of the community as a starting point for development. The first stage, *discovery* or *asset mapping*, is done by identifying human assets such as Bu Masruah's pedagogical skills which include language adaptability in teaching, the application of experiential learning, as well as the creation of a participatory classroom atmosphere and the ability of older children to act as peer tutors. In addition, other assets identified include children's linguistic skills, informal learning groups, PKBM networks, Indonesian communities, as well as institutional and physical assets such as studio rooms, simple modules, and support from PKBM/Indonesian Embassy (Bela et al., 2024). Thus, Mrs. Masruah's pedagogical skills are not only limited to mastering teaching materials, but also to cross-cultural communication strategies, empowering children through collaborative learning, and creating a positive emotional climate. This asset is an important foundation in the mobilization stage of community assets, because the quality of learning is highly dependent on the ability of teachers to adapt methods to the diverse conditions of migrant children.

Based on the mapping, the second stage is *mobilization*, namely asset utilization strategies through the use of peer tutors, simple module development, flexible learning scheduling, and collection of teaching materials from donations. The third stage, *connecting*, emphasizing the role of teachers as a liaison between studios, PKBM, families, and further education opportunities, so that migrant children still have access to a wider range of educational paths. The fourth stage, *leveraging for development*, is done by optimizing assets for ongoing programs such as reading routines, language exercises, and character development. The fifth stage, *feedback & sustainability*, implemented through feedback mechanisms from children, teachers, and PKBM to evaluate the effectiveness of the program and strengthen the sustainability of the activities (Qiaoyu et al., 2024). All of these stages are carried out by paying attention to ethical procedures, namely obtaining oral consent from Mrs. Masruah, providing an explanation of the purpose of the research to the children in simple language that is easy to understand, and maintaining the confidentiality of the child's identity so that it is not published

individually. Thus, the use of the ABCD framework is not only methodologically relevant, but also in line with the principles of inclusion, community empowerment, and respect for research ethics in migrant environments (South dkk., 2024).

### 3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that teachers at Sanggar Bijmbingan Sungai Mulia 5 (SBSM 5) play a very crucial role in building a multicultural and inclusive learning environment for Indonesian migrant children. The role of teachers does not stop at the delivery of academic materials, but also includes the function of cultural mediators who bridge differences in languages, customs, and diverse social backgrounds among students. In addition, teachers function as emotional facilitators who provide psychological support, build a sense of security, and foster motivation to learn in the midst of the condition of children who often face social limitations and longing for parents who are busy working. Teachers also act as social liaisons (*social broker*) that connects children with PKBM, Indonesian communities, and other educational networks so that they still have access to further learning pathways. This multifunctional role is key to overcoming the main obstacles faced by migrant children, such as limited legal documents, language gaps, and lack of access to formal schools. Thus, this study confirms that the success of multicultural education in the context of migrants is not only determined by the availability of facilities, but is highly dependent on the capacity of teachers to manage diversity and optimize community assets (Akin-Sabuncu et al., 2024b).

The research shows that the application of the *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) approach emphasizes the role of teachers in the Sungai Mulia 5 Guidance Studio as multifaceted figures who are able to manage cultural diversity in the classroom. One of its main roles is as a cultural mediator, which is to bridge the differences in language, customs, and social backgrounds brought by migrant children. This is reflected in Mrs. Masruah's strategy of not only using Indonesian as the main language of instruction, but also mixing it with simple terms or regional languages so that all children feel understood and not alienated. He said:

*"The children here have different backgrounds, some are fluent in Indonesian, some are more often used in the regional language. So I mix languages so that they still understand and are not nervous when studying."*

This practice not only makes it easier to understand the material, but it also fosters a sense of community and reduces social distance among diverse students. Thus, teachers play an important role in normalizing differences and creating more inclusive learning spaces. These findings are in line with the literature that emphasizes the importance of teachers' roles as cross-cultural facilitators in multicultural education, where learning success is largely determined by the teacher's ability to integrate students' language and culture into the pedagogical process (Abdurahman Siswanto et al., 2025).

In addition to acting as cultural mediators, teachers at SBSM 5 also play an important role as emotional facilitators who focus on the psychosocial well-being of migrant children. This role is crucial because most children often face pressures due to migration conditions, such as loneliness when left behind by their parents at work, low self-confidence, or experiences of discrimination in the surrounding environment. Based on the interview, Mrs. Masruah said:

*"There are children who like to be depressed because their parents work all day. So I talk to them first, give them encouragement, so that they feel cared for. If the atmosphere is warm, they will be more enthusiastic about learning."*

This saying shows that teachers not only deliver lessons, but also act as emotional reinforcement figures who help children feel cared for and appreciated. By creating a warm classroom atmosphere, teachers succeed in building students' intrinsic motivation to be more active in learning. These findings reinforce the literature that asserts that emotional support from teachers not only increases academic motivation, but also becomes a protective factor against the psychological distress that migrant children often experience (Guo, 2022).

In addition to playing a role in cognitive and emotional aspects, teachers at SBSM 5 also carry out

a vital function as a social liaison that bridges structural limitations with the local potential of the community. In practice, Mrs. Masruah not only relies on her personal capacity as a teacher, but also actively builds networks with PKBM, the Indonesian community, and students' parents to strengthen educational support. Mrs. Masruah explained:

*"I often coordinate with PKBM so that there are additional modules. Sometimes we also ask for help from parents or the community if there are activities, so everyone can support the children."*

This statement shows that teachers function as *Social Brokers* or connectivity agents that are able to mobilize external resources to enrich the learning experience of migrant children. This role not only provides practical solutions to limited facilities and funding, but also strengthens the sense of community and ownership of the educational process. Thus, teachers become strategic actors who connect various social, institutional, and cultural assets so that the learning process can take place more inclusive and sustainable. This is in line with the principle *Asset-Based Community Development (ABCD)* which emphasizes the importance of strengthening community networks and utilizing local assets as the foundation of educational success in migrant environments (South dkk., 2024).

In the context of the implementation of ABCD, Mrs. Masruah's pedagogical skills, solidarity between children, and PKBM support have proven to be the main assets. For example, older children often act as peer *tutors* for their younger classmates. Thus, strengthening human, social, and institutional assets has proven to be a foundation that not only improves the quality of learning, but also strengthens the educational sustainability of migrant communities. These findings are in line with the literature that confirms that the success of community-based education is highly dependent on the mobilization of local assets and the active participation of all community members

The author conducted a teaching session for the children of the guidance studio in Figure 1.2.



Figure 1.2 The author performs the teaching process

Although asset-based approaches have proven effective in strengthening migrant children's learning, the study also found that a variety of structural challenges remain significant limiting factors. The main obstacle lies in the legal status of migrant children who are not officially recognised in the Malaysian education system, so they do not have access to public schools or formal educational facilities. This condition makes the studio completely dependent on non-formal channels that are vulnerable to policy changes and lack of government support. In addition, limited operational funds cause learning activities to be highly dependent on donations, voluntary assistance, and teachers' creativity in managing simple resources. Another obstacle is the lack of formal recognition of the studio as part of the national education system, so that the certificates or learning outcomes of children do not have official legitimacy to continue their education to a higher level. These findings are consistent with studies that confirm that structural limitations in terms of regulation, funding, and institutional recognition are the main barriers for non-formal educational institutions in migrant communities, which, despite being rich in social assets, still face inequalities in access to formal education (I'm

Disabled, 2024).

This study confirms that in the context of multicultural education for migrant children, teachers cannot be seen only as instructors focused on knowledge transfer, but also as community agents with dual functions: educational, emotional, and social. This role requires teachers to have a broad adaptive capacity, ranging from the ability to build cross-cultural communication, provide psychosocial support, to bridging social and institutional networks. Theoretically, the results of this study strengthen the relevance of the approach *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) in the education study of migrant communities, emphasizing that asset-based development is more effective than deficit-based approaches in creating sustainability of learning. Meanwhile, in practical terms, these findings imply the need for continuous training programs for teachers, particularly in multilingual skills, inclusive pedagogy, as well as simple strategies for mapping and mobilizing community assets. Thus, teachers not only function as educators in the classroom, but also as catalysts for social change that are able to strengthen the capacity of migrant communities to survive and thrive in the midst of structural limitations (Bela et al., 2024).

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that teachers at the Sungai Mulia 5 Guidance Studio play a crucial role in overcoming the multicultural learning challenges of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. This role is not only limited to teaching, but also as a cultural mediator who normalizes differences in language and habits, an emotional facilitator who provides psychosocial support, and a social liaison who establishes relationships between studios, PKBM, and the surrounding community. Thus, the research objective of understanding teacher strategies in the context of community-based multicultural education was successfully achieved.

Practically, the findings of this study confirm the importance of strengthening teacher capacity through inclusive pedagogical training, multilingual skills, and community asset mapping skills. Theoretically, the results of the study expand the application of the *Asset-Based Community Development* (ABCD) approach in the context of non-formal education, especially in migrant communities. This approach has been proven to be able to emphasize the potential and solidarity of the community as a sustainable educational resource.

However, this study has limitations because it focuses on one studio and one teacher, so generalizations are still limited. Subsequent research is suggested to expand the location and subject of the research in order to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the role of teachers in various migrant communities. In addition, longitudinal studies are needed to assess the long-term impact of the ABCD approach on the academic and social development of migrant children.

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