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Economic Empowerment through Vocational Training: A Case Study of Shibori Production among Indonesian Migrant Workers in Taiwan

Dyantika Putry Mahmud

Ummi Fakhriyah Jayatri *

Mohammad Adam Jerusalem

Bachelor of Industrial Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Negeri Yogyakarta

email:
ummifakhriyahjayatri@uny.ac.id

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Abstrak

Taiwan merupakan tujuan kedua terbesar bagi Pekerja Migran Indonesia (PMI) setelah Malaysia, dengan menawarkan upah yang kompetitif dan kondisi kerja yang lebih baik. Namun, para PMI masih menghadapi berbagai tantangan, seperti kesenjangan upah, eksploitasi, diskriminasi, serta hambatan bahasa dan budaya. Masalah-masalah ini sering membuat mereka kembali ke Indonesia dengan prospek ekonomi yang tidak pasti. Untuk menjawab tantangan tersebut, sebuah kegiatan pemberdayaan masyarakat dilaksanakan guna membekali PMI dengan keterampilan praktis dan pengetahuan kewirausahaan. Kegiatan ini sejalan dengan Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), khususnya SDG 8 (Pekerjaan Layak dan Pertumbuhan Ekonomi), SDG 4 (Pendidikan Berkualitas), dan SDG 10 (Pengurangan Kesenjangan). Pelatihan difokuskan pada teknik Shibori, yaitu teknik pewarnaan kain tradisional Jepang yang memiliki potensi pasar tinggi, serta keterampilan dasar pemasaran digital. Kegiatan ini dilaksanakan bekerja sama dengan Pimpinan Cabang Istimewa Muhammadiyah (PCIM) Taiwan melalui sesi daring tentang kewirausahaan dan pelatihan langsung pembuatan Shibori. Peserta dibimbing dalam proses produksi dan strategi promosi, sehingga mampu menciptakan dan memasarkan produk kreatif secara mandiri. Setiap peserta berhasil menghasilkan produk yang layak jual dan memperoleh pengetahuan dasar untuk memulai usaha. Inisiatif ini menegaskan peran industri kreatif dalam mendorong kemandirian, mengurangi kerentanan PMI, serta mendukung ekonomi kreatif Indonesia.

Abstract

Taiwan is the second most popular destination for Indonesian migrant workers (PMIs) after Malaysia, offering competitive wages and better working conditions. However, many PMIs still face challenges such as wage disparities, exploitation, discrimination, and language or cultural barriers. These issues often result in PMIs returning to Indonesia with limited economic prospects. In response, a community empowerment program was implemented to equip PMIs with practical skills and entrepreneurial knowledge, aligning with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth), Goal 4 (Quality Education), and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities). The program provided training in Shibori, a traditional Japanese fabric-dyeing technique with strong market potential, as well as basic digital marketing skills. Conducted in collaboration with the Taiwan Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM Taiwan), the program combined online business workshops and offline hands-on Shibori training. Participants were guided in both production and promotion, enabling them to independently develop and market creative products. The initiative demonstrated high participant engagement, with each individual successfully producing a marketable item and acquiring the foundational knowledge to pursue entrepreneurship. The program highlighted the potential of the creative industries to foster self-reliance, reduce vulnerabilities in PMI, and contribute to Indonesia's creative economy.

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INTRODUCTION

According to data from Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI), Taiwan ranks as the second-largest destination for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), following Malaysia and ahead of Hong Kong, Saudi Arabia, and Singapore. Komarudin et al. (2023) highlight three key reasons for the increasing number of PMIs in Taiwan. First, wages offered in Taiwan are more competitive compared to other Asia-Pacific countries such as Singapore, Hong Kong, and Malaysia. Second, the quality of life in Taiwan is perceived as better, supported by government regulations on working hours that prevent overwork and ensure regular days off. Third, the incidence of mistreatment in Taiwan is significantly lower than in Saudi Arabia or Malaysia. BP2MI data shows over 15,000 complaints from PMIs in Saudi Arabia, more than 11,000 from Malaysia, and only around 4,000 from PMIs in Taiwan. Despite these advantages, PMIs in Taiwan still face various issues, such as wage discrepancies, exploitation by recruitment agencies, limited access to facilities for religious observance, and language or cultural barriers that affect daily life. Some also face discrimination, poor treatment by employers, and violations of employment contracts (Maksum *et al.,* 2020; Ndarujati, 2021; Nevia & Perkasa, 2024). Many PMIs return to Indonesia without stable employment or clear income sources, adding to their economic challenges.

To respond to these challenges, community service programs (PkM) aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) become essential, though the connection must go beyond surface-level alignment. PMIs often return with limited education, minimal savings, and few opportunities, leaving them vulnerable in a competitive job market (Maksum, 2021). This program focuses on SDG Goal 8 (Decent Work and Economic Growth) by equipping migrant workers with practical skills to strengthen their financial independence and explore entrepreneurial pathways. In addition to building income alternatives, the initiative also supports Goal 4 (Quality Education) by encouraging lifelong learning, and Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by helping PMIs overcome social and economic barriers.

The community service program is designed to empower PMIs with creative and practical skills in producing Shibori products, a traditional Japanese dyeing technique that offers significant market potential, as demonstrated by its growing application in the fashion industry, including high-value products like silk scarves. With an increasing interest from consumers, Shibori offers innovation and variety that align with modern fashion trends (Amalia *et al.,* 2020; Savana & Ardianto, 2024). To fully capitalize on this market potential, digital business strategies become essential in promoting Shibori products. In an era where online shopping and social media dominate consumer behavior, platforms like Instagram, Facebook, and e-commerce sites provide ideal avenues to showcase the distinctive designs and cultural value of Shibori (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Laudon & Traver, 2020). Techniques such as search engine optimization (SEO), targeted advertising, and engaging content creation enable entrepreneurs to expand their market reach, connect with niche audiences, and enhance brand visibility. By integrating digital marketing into their business models, PMIs can maximize their product potential and establish a sustainable presence in the creative economy (Chaffey & Ellis-Chadwick, 2019; Evans, 2010; Tuten, 2023).

Conceptually, this program is grounded in three interrelated frameworks. First, human capital theory frames vocational skill acquisition as an investment that raises returning migrants' earning capacity beyond wage labor (Maksum 2021). Second, andragogy and experiential learning theory explain why adult migrant learners require short, practice-based, immediately applicable instruction rather than classroom pedagogy, which informed the hands-on design of the offline session. Third, community-based empowerment situates the partner organization (PCIM Taiwan) as the social infrastructure that sustains the intervention after the facilitators leave. The conceptual novelty of this program lies in coupling a craft-production skill with digital market access in a single learning pathway, so that skill acquisition and income realization are not separated by the participants' return migration. Framed by the community-empowerment perspectives outlined above, this program pairs vocational skill acquisition with digital market access rather than treating skill training as an end in itself. Its potential contribution to economic independence is proposed here as a working model to be tested, not as a demonstrated outcome of this implementation cycle. Alongside its intended benefit for participants, the program also reflects the university's institutional commitment to impactful community engagement, as emphasized in Key

Performance Indicator (IKU) 3. The initiative thus addresses an economic need identified among PMIs while also serving academic objectives in community service and cross-cultural collaboration.

METHODS

The proposed solution to address the issues faced by PMIs in Taiwan centers on training and educational programs, as well as economic development strategies. This community service project features two main training programs: shibori product production (offline training) and business skills in digital marketing (online training), as shown in Figure 1. These training sessions aim to enhance participants with productive skills that can bring economic gains. The shibori production training intends to build PMI participants' skills in creating shibori products, enhancing their creativity to produce innovative and marketable items, and motivating them to pursue economically beneficial activities. Meanwhile, the digital marketing training aims to develop a strong business sense and entrepreneurial mindset among participants, empowering them to transition from PMI workers to independent business owners upon returning to Indonesia.

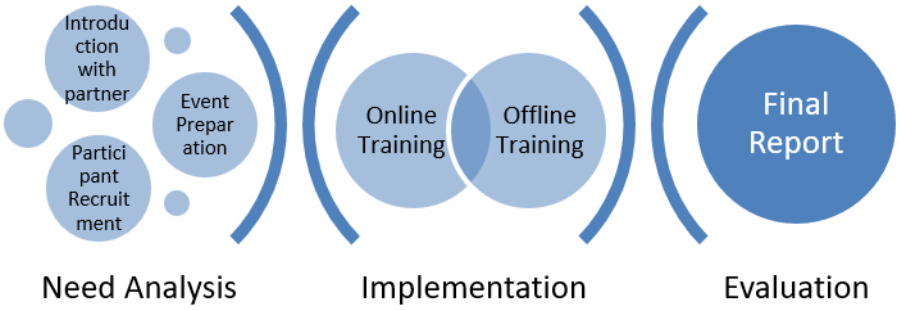


Figure 1. Implementation Stages

The graphic illustrates the stages of the Community Service Program for PMI in Taiwan. It begins with Needs Analysis, which includes introduction to the partner organization, event preparation, and participant recruitment to ensure the program is well-targeted and organized. The next stage, Implementation, involves two types of training sessions: an Online Training for preliminary learning and an Offline Training for hands-on practice. Finally, the Evaluation stage concludes with a Final Report, summarizing the outcomes, effectiveness, and impact of the program. This structured approach ensures thorough preparation, practical learning, and assessment of results.

This Community Service Program targets 25 PMIs in Taiwan, both male and female, with support from the Taiwan Special Branch of Muhammadiyah (PCIM Taiwan) as a partner. Participants were recruited purposively through PCIM Taiwan networks using three inclusion criteria: currently working in Taiwan under a valid contract, no prior formal training in textile crafts, and an expressed intention to start a small business after returning to Indonesia. These criteria were derived from an initial screening conducted through focus group discussion with PCIM Taiwan during the problem-formulation stage, which established the participants' starting conditions and training needs; it served as a qualitative needs assessment rather than as a quantified baseline measurement. The cohort size of 25 was not determined by statistical sampling but by the pedagogical and logistical constraints of a single hands-on session: one instructor with two assistants can effectively supervise roughly 25 learners during simultaneous dyeing work, and the volume of dyeing materials and equipment that could be transported to the training site set a practical ceiling on the number of participants, alongside the capacity of the outdoor venue. Post-activity evaluation was correspondingly outcome-based, resting on the Shibori product each participant completed rather than on a pre- and post-training instrument. Findings are therefore not intended to be statistically generalizable; they describe the feasibility and immediate outcomes of the intervention for this cohort. PCIM Taiwan plays a crucial role in coordinating and organizing PMI, including disseminating information and managing participant registration. The program is conducted in two stages: an online session for material introduction and initial

interaction, followed by an on-site session at Da'an Park, Taipei, where participants engage in hands-on practice. PCIM Taiwan is also responsible for technical and logistical preparations on-site, ensuring that all event needs are well-organized so that the PkM activities run smoothly and provide maximum benefits for PMI in Taiwan.

Shibori was selected over other candidate skills (culinary production, tailoring, handicraft assembly) on four criteria relevant to the PMI context. First, entry barriers are low: the basic technique can be mastered within a single session and requires no machinery, only fabric, binding materials, and dye. Second, start-up capital is minimal and the materials are obtainable both in Taiwan and in Indonesia, so production can begin while participants are still abroad and continue after return. Third, the output is lightweight, non-perishable, and therefore suited to e-commerce shipping, unlike food products. Fourth, each piece is inherently unique, which supports premium pricing and differentiation on digital marketplaces rather than competition on price. Prior community programs report comparable feasibility for non-specialist adult learners (Amalia, Izzhati, and Mayasari 2020; Savana and Ardianto 2024).

Technically, Shibori is a traditional Japanese textile-dyeing technique that creates distinct and artistic designs through binding, folding, and resist dyeing (Callender, 2017; Wahyuni & Supardi, 2017). This technique can be used on a variety of fashion and home decor products, such as kimonos, blouses, scarves, and cushion covers, as well as in limited-edition collections, which adds an element of exclusivity to the items (Rice *et al.,* 2012). The process involves several key stages, including preparing materials, tying, dyeing, and finishing, which ultimately produces unique patterns and aesthetic appeal (Callender, 2017; Rice *et al.,* 2012). In contemporary markets, Shibori products attract eco-conscious consumers who value both traditional craftsmanship and sustainable production approaches (Boutrup & Ellis, 2018; Gunner, 2010). Combining digital marketing with Shibori products enables businesses to expand their reach and tap into the growing demand for sustainable, artisanal items, while also supporting economic empowerment.

This training employs an Outcome-Based Learning approach as the primary success indicator, aiming for each participant to achieve two key outcomes: first, to produce one shibori product as a measurable skill demonstration, and second, to create an account on a marketplace platform to facilitate the marketing of their creations (Suhara *et al.,* 2025). The success indicators of this training are not only assessed by participants' products and technical abilities but also by their level of participation, including attendance and enthusiasm throughout the entire program. This design follows the logic of outcome-based evaluation, in which achievement is judged from the observable result of an activity rather than from the volume of activity delivered, together with the principle that learning objectives are defined at the outset and every element of the activity is arranged to reach them. The completed Shibori product therefore stands as the concrete evidence of the first objective, and the marketplace account as evidence of the second. Through this approach, the training is expected to enhance participants' practical skills while simultaneously opening new economic opportunities that can be accessed digitally.

Evaluation in this program relied on direct verification of outcomes and on facilitator observation, not on a pre-test–post-test design. Both indicators were verified for every participant. Product completion was checked by the instructor at the end of the practical session, and account creation was confirmed on site by the facilitators. Participation was recorded through attendance logs for both the online and the offline session, and qualitative information was drawn from facilitator observation and participants' open-ended feedback at the close of the activity. No baseline questionnaire was administered and no post-training measurement instrument was used; consequently, changes in participants' knowledge, confidence, or income were not quantified. It should also be stated plainly that the two indicators capture readiness to sell rather than selling itself: by the end of the program period, no participant had yet begun trading. The absence of baseline and follow-up measurement is acknowledged as a methodological limitation of this implementation cycle and is addressed in the recommendations

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of this community service program was attended by 25 PMIs in Taiwan. The high attendance rate indicates a positive response and strong interest from participants, reflecting the program's success in attracting attention and meeting their needs. The program was conducted in both online and offline sessions. The online sessions focused on

business startup training and digital marketing strategies, where participants gained insights into launching a digital business, using e-commerce platforms, and effective marketing techniques, specifically for Shibori products. This material aimed to strengthen participants' understanding of building a brand and expanding their market through digital marketing, enabling them to market their products online while working in Taiwan and upon returning to Indonesia.



Figure 2. Documentation of the Shibori training sessions: (a) review session about Shibori and its market potential; (b) introduction to tools, materials, and types of dye; (c) fabric folding and binding practice; (d) dyeing process under instructor guidance.

For the offline training, the main focus was hands-on practice in creating Shibori-based products. Prior to the practical session, participants were introduced to the basics of Shibori production, including understanding the tools and materials used, types of dyes, fabric folding techniques, and the overall production process. This preparation was essential to ensure that participants understood the foundational principles and techniques they would apply during the hands-on session. During the practice, each participant was guided to create one Shibori product, which they could take home as a product of their own making. The documentation of the Shibori training implementation can be seen in Figure 2.

According to the initial plan, the training was designed to use natural dyes for a more environmentally friendly and sustainable approach. However, due to limitations on carrying materials during flights, synthetic dyes were substituted for their practicality and ease of transport and use at the training location. Despite this adjustment, the essence of the training was maintained, and participants were still able to learn the basic Shibori production techniques and its marketable

potential. The training's success was measured not only by the products created but also by the new knowledge and skills acquired by participants, which are expected to open up new economic opportunities through digital businesses based on creative products.

The community service activity prioritized a hands-on and interactive learning experience, with Dr. Noor Fitrihana as the lead instructor. The training took place at Da'an Park in Taipei, a location chosen for its easy accessibility to participants. This hands-on segment was a core part of the training series, where participants could directly apply Shibori production techniques using the provided tools and materials. Each participant received a set of materials, including pre-folded fabric, color stabilizers, synthetic dye, basins, rubber bands for binding, thin-wall containers for dye, waterproof mats, latex gloves, and aprons. This comprehensive setup enabled participants to engage fully in the Shibori-making process.

The success of the practical session was evidenced by each participant's ability to complete one Shibori product according to the techniques and creativity they had learned, as shown in Figure 3. The supportive and practice-based learning approach allowed participants to gain a solid understanding of Shibori techniques. This training not only provided technical skills but also boosted participants' confidence in creating marketable, creative products with economic potential. Evaluation results indicated that the Shibori training in Da'an Park was conducted smoothly and achieved its primary objectives. Participants not only successfully completed unique Shibori products, showcasing creativity and attention to detail, but also expressed enthusiasm for applying these skills in future business endeavors.

These outcomes nevertheless require a cautious reading. The outcomes recorded are confined to immediate, directly verifiable deliverables: all 25 participants completed one Shibori product and opened a marketplace account, but none had listed or sold a product by the end of the program. The two indicators therefore evidence readiness to trade, not trading activity or income. Three constraints emerged during implementation. First, the substitution of synthetic for natural dyes weakened the sustainability positioning that gives Shibori much of its premium value in eco-conscious markets (Boutrup and Ellis 2018), meaning participants were trained on a product narrative they cannot yet fully deliver. Second, the single practice session was too short for participants to internalise pattern variation, which limits their ability to build a differentiated product line. Third, and most consequential for viability, digital selling from Taiwan faces structural obstacles the training could not remove: restricted working hours, limited access to Indonesian payment and logistics systems, and marketplace registration requirements tied to residency. These conditions mean that market access, not craft skill, is the binding constraint on income generation, a point that broader vocational-training literature also identifies as the common failure point of skills-only interventions (Maksum 2021). Sustaining the outcomes therefore depends on the continuing role of PCIM Taiwan as a mentoring and aggregation channel, and on follow-up support at the point of return to Indonesia, neither of which was formally scheduled within this program cycle.



Figure 3. Outputs of the Shibori training session: (a) finished Shibori pieces produced by participants; (b) participants with their own products at the end of the session.

CONCLUSION

The community service program focused on Shibori product training for Indonesian migrant workers (PMIs) in Taiwan was carried out successfully, with 25 participants taking part actively from start to finish. The program was well received, marked by strong enthusiasm and constructive feedback from the participants and the broader PMI community. Rather than focusing solely on technical skills, the training also introduced participants to the fundamentals of entrepreneurship and digital marketing. The combination of online and face-to-face sessions enabled participants to not only learn how to produce Shibori textiles but also to explore how these products could serve as potential sources of income, either while still abroad or after returning to Indonesia. Although the program encountered certain limitations, such as restricted time for practice and the initial use of chemical dyes instead of natural ones, these challenges did not hinder the participants' progress. They showed dedication and curiosity, particularly in learning the basic principles of environmentally friendly dyeing techniques. Overall, the program contributed meaningfully to the development of participants' practical skills and entrepreneurial mindset. More importantly, it offered a space for empowerment, where migrant workers could reflect on their future economic opportunities. Theoretically, this initiative contributes a transitional-livelihood model for migrant workers: it shows that pairing a low-barrier craft skill with digital market access allows the human-capital investment to begin while the worker is still abroad and to be carried across the return-migration boundary, rather than starting from zero upon repatriation. It also identifies market access, not skill acquisition, as the binding constraint in this setting, which refines how community-service interventions for migrant populations should be designed and sequenced.

The main limitations are the absence of any baseline or post-training measurement instrument, so learning gains could not be quantified; outcome indicators that stop at readiness to sell, since no participant had begun trading within the program period; and the lack of longitudinal data on income; future programs should incorporate follow-up assessment six to twelve months after return, an economic-viability analysis of the products, and a diaspora-organization mentoring scheme to test whether the model generates durable income. Within these limits, the initiative demonstrates how creative skill-building, when combined with business literacy, can support sustainable livelihood development and strengthen the long-term resilience of migrant communities..

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