



The dynamic governance for basic education access of Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia continue to face persistent challenges, particularly regarding access to basic education for their children in Sabah and Sarawak. These challenges arise from unclear legal status, limited educational infrastructure, low parental awareness, and weak educational governance. This study examines the implementation of dynamic governance at Community Learning Centers (CLCs) in Sabah and Sarawak as an adaptive strategy by the Indonesian government to ensure the fulfillment of the basic education rights of the children. Employing a qualitative and post-positivist approach, the data were collected through in-depth interviews and an extensive review of relevant literature. The findings reveal that the management of CLCs embodies dynamic governance characteristics, including adaptability, innovation, and collaboration, which are reinforced by national culture and identity: 1) adaptability to local regulatory environments and sociocultural contexts, 2) innovation in curriculum design and pedagogical methods, and 3) collaboration with multiple stakeholders involving the Indonesian and Malaysian governments, non-governmental organizations, and local communities. Furthermore, CLCs play a pivotal role in strengthening national identity among the children through the use of Indonesia's national curriculum, the Indonesian language, and cultural activities, such as flag raising ceremony and Independence Day celebrations. Nevertheless, structural issues persist, including the lack of legal recognition, limited teaching staff, and inadequate facilities. The study underscores the necessity of dynamic, participatory, and sustainable governance to enhance access to basic education while reinforcing the cultural and national identity of the children of immigrant workers. The study encourages innovative governance models that can further improve educational access and equity for the children of immigrant workers in CLCs across Sabah and Sarawak.

Keywords: migrant workers, Indonesian migrant workers, Children Community Learning Centers (CLCs), dynamic governance, basic education

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INTRODUCTION

A substantial proportion of Indonesian citizens are employed overseas as Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI), driven primarily by economic motivations such as the pursuit of higher income, better living standards, and limited employment opportunities within Indonesia (Parobi & Maryam, 2023; Sholina, 2022; Tjiptoherijanto & Harmadi, 2008). According to the Ministry of Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection/Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (2024), approximately 5.08 million PMIs are legally registered worldwide. While this migration contributes significantly to improving household welfare and national economic growth through remittance inflows, it also presents various sociocultural challenges. PMIs often face difficulties in adapting to the lifestyles, norms, and cultural environments of their host countries. Nevertheless, their economic contributions are substantial, as their remittances not only enhance

the livelihoods of their families but also serve as a critical source of foreign exchange that supports Indonesia's macroeconomic stability and development (Sholina, 2022).

Malaysia has long been recognized as one of the primary destinations for Indonesian migrant workers, following Hong Kong and Taiwan (Wulandari et al., 2022; Idris, 2020). It hosts the largest community of Indonesian citizens residing abroad, estimated at approximately 2.5 million individuals (ANTARA, 2019; Komisi Pemilihan Umum Republik Indonesia, n.d.). However, a significant portion of this population remains unregistered with Indonesia's official representative offices in Malaysia. The majority of Indonesians in the country are employed as migrant laborers, are married to Malaysian citizens, or are descendants of Indonesian nationals who retain Indonesian citizenship. Malaysia's geographical proximity, along with linguistic and cultural similarities, has further contributed to its attractiveness as a preferred destination for labor migration from Indonesia.

Most Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia are concentrated in the informal sectors, particularly in plantations, construction, domestic services, manufacturing, and factory work (Kompas, 2025; RRI, 2025; Sapudin & Luthfie, 2023; Sholina, 2022; ANTARA, 2019). A considerable number are employed in oil palm plantations across Sabah and Sarawak, sectors that play a pivotal role in Malaysia's national economy (Handrianto et al., 2021; Wong et al., 2021).

Despite their economic significance, a large proportion of these workers enter or remain in Malaysia without valid documentation or work permits, thereby becoming irregular or undocumented migrants. This phenomenon is often perpetuated by social networks among workers, the influence of successful migration stories, and the expectation of improved living conditions (Sholina, 2022; Sopyan, 2021). Over time, many migrant workers who have resided in Malaysia for extended periods become reluctant to return home, overstaying their visas and consequently being categorized as *Pendatang Asing Tanpa Izin (PATI)*, or Unauthorized Foreign Migrants, under Malaysian law (Christie, 2016). Meanwhile, plantation owners and employers who engage these undocumented workers frequently face minimal legal repercussions (Kompas, 2025). This situation underscores the urgent need for stronger intervention and coordination by Indonesian diplomatic missions in Malaysia (KBRI/KJRI) to identify, protect, and assist migrant workers confronting socioeconomic and legal challenges.

Within Malaysia's palm oil plantations, both documented and undocumented Indonesian migrant workers often interact and form social relationships that occasionally lead to marriage. These unions are frequently conducted informally, typically through religious ceremonies, and consequently result in children born within plantation communities (Sholina, 2022; Anita et al., 2021; Diliawan & Rahayu, 2018). Marriages involving undocumented migrant workers or foreign nationals frequently produce children without official legal status or civil documentation, such as birth certificates (Wong et al., 2021). The absence of such legal recognition renders these children vulnerable, restricting their access to basic rights and public services, including education and healthcare in Malaysia (Wulandari et al., 2022; Wong et al., 2021).

Education is universally recognized as a fundamental human right, as enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). As a member of the United Nations, Indonesia bears the responsibility to uphold and protect the right to education for all its citizens, regardless of their geographical location. This obligation is firmly rooted in Article 31 of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia, which guarantees every citizen's right to education and mandates the government to finance it (Undang-Undang Dasar Negara Republik Indonesia 1945, 1945). Furthermore, Article 5 of Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection reinforces that every child has the right to clear citizenship status, access to education, healthcare, an adequate standard of living, and social assistance (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 23 of 2002 on Child Protection (2002)). Similarly, Law No. 20 of 2003 on the National Education System stipulates that every citizen is entitled to quality education and that the state must ensure the implementation of free basic education programs (Law of the Republic of Indonesia Number 20 of 2003 on the National Education System (2003)). Collectively, these legal frameworks affirm that all Indonesian citizens including those residing abroad, are entitled to educational services, underscoring the state's obligation to guarantee inclusive and equitable education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers.

The Indonesian government has sought to address the challenges faced by its citizens abroad, particularly in ensuring access to education, by providing equitable and quality educational services. For the children of Indonesian citizens residing overseas, these efforts are realized through the establishment of Indonesian Overseas Schools (Sekolah Indonesia di Luar Negeri, SILN). As of 2025, thirteen SILNs operate in various countries worldwide (Good News from Indonesia, 2025). In Malaysia, three SILNs serve the educational needs of Indonesian migrant workers' children: the Indonesian School in Kuala Lumpur (SIKL) and the Indonesian School in Johor Bahru (SIJB) in Peninsular Malaysia, and the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) in East Malaysia. However, due to the large number of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) and the limited capacity of these schools, the Indonesian government has expanded educational access through Community Learning Activity Centers (Pusat Kegiatan Belajar Masyarakat, PKBM) and Community Learning Centers (CLC).

In East Malaysia, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak, most PMI children obtain educational services through CLCs, which operate alongside SIKK. These centers were established to extend basic educational opportunities to children living within or near oil palm plantation areas. Functioning as a collaborative platform between governments, plantation companies, and non-governmental organizations, CLCs aim to realize the right to basic education for children of migrant workers (Diliawan & Rahayu, 2018). As of 2025, 225 CLCs are providing elementary and lower secondary education across East Malaysia, comprising 167 in Sabah and 58 in Sarawak. All of these CLCs operate under the academic and administrative supervision of SIKK. Teachers assigned to CLCs include Bina Teachers recruited and deployed by Indonesia's Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education (Kemdikdasmen) and Pamong Teachers employed and financially supported by plantation companies.

To address documentation issues, the Indonesian diplomatic missions in Malaysia have implemented programs to assist undocumented citizens, including the children of migrant workers, in obtaining essential civil documents such as birth certificates and passports. Although Malaysian public schools accept Indonesian children who meet certain requirements, the associated costs remain prohibitively high for most plantation workers and low-income families. Financial limitations thus continue to serve as a major barrier to accessing formal education (Webber, 2019; Cavaille & Marshall, 2018). In this context, the establishment of CLCs provides a strategic and inclusive solution for fulfilling the educational rights of PMI children.

Beyond access and affordability, another critical issue is the gradual erosion of national identity among the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Sabah and Sarawak. Many of these children were born and raised in Malaysia and have never visited Indonesia. As a result, they are more familiar with Malaysian linguistic and cultural norms than their own national identity. Education grounded in the Indonesian language and culture is therefore essential to reintroduce and reinforce their sense of belonging as Indonesians. Previous studies have shown that many of these children have limited knowledge of Indonesia's national symbols, such as the national anthem, the flag, and historical heritage and tend to prefer using the Malay language over Indonesian (Suarno et al., 2021; Prasetyo et al., 2020). This weakening sense of nationalism not only reflects the cultural disconnection among PMI children but also raises broader concerns about identity continuity and the future of Indonesia's transnational citizens.

Despite the Indonesian government's efforts to ensure educational access for all citizens, the provision of basic education services for the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI) remains inadequate, particularly in Sabah and Sarawak. Multiple barriers prevent stateless and undocumented PMI children from obtaining basic education, leaving many deprived of learning and development opportunities (Loganathan et al., 2023; Reyes-Veras et al., 2021; Dewantara et al., 2019). First, Malaysia's education policy restricts access to public schools for legally registered foreign citizens, while the high tuition fees remain unaffordable for most migrant families. Second, although non-formal education is available through CLCs, these institutions face severe limitations, including inadequate facilities, insufficient teaching staff, and overburdened teachers who must handle multiple subjects and grade levels. Third, some migrant parents have limited awareness of the value of education, often prioritizing immediate income generation over schooling, a mindset reflected in the belief that "it is better to work than to study."

This intergenerational perception risks perpetuating cycles of low education, informal labor, and poverty among PMI families.

The education of PMI children in Malaysia thus represents a complex transnational issue that requires coordinated attention from both governments and multiple stakeholders. Although collaborative efforts between Indonesia and Malaysia have led to the establishment of CLCs, persistent governance challenges continue to undermine the effectiveness of these initiatives. The governance of basic education through CLCs operates under atypical institutional conditions: unlike conventional governance hierarchies that extend from central to local authorities, education services for PMI children in Sabah and Sarawak are directly managed by the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) as a representative institution of the Indonesian government. In this decentralized context, CLCs are granted autonomy to adapt educational management practices to local realities, evolving technologies, and dynamic policy environments.

However, the educational governance of CLCs remains constrained by a range of structural and contextual challenges, including limited access to formal education, weak regulatory frameworks, the absence of local government involvement, resource scarcity, and ambiguous legal status. These multi-layered challenges demand a governance approach that is dynamic, adaptive, and resilient. As Mayarni et al. (2021) argue, dynamic governance emphasizes a government's ability to continuously adjust programs and policies to ensure long-term sustainability. In the case of CLCs in Malaysia, governance must be capable of responding to transnational complexities, including fluctuating political relations, shifting immigration policies, and diverse cultural environments.

Traditional governance frameworks, such as good governance and collaborative governance, though valuable for explaining normative principles and institutional arrangements, remain inadequate to capture the adaptive, cross-cultural, and dynamic characteristics of migrant education governance (Mayarni et al., 2021; Piipponen & Virkkunen, 2020).

Dynamic Governance Theory, as conceptualized by Neo and Chen (2007), offers a more comprehensive analytical framework for understanding how governments can innovate and adapt in complex environments. Integrating capability-based governance with cultural and institutional learning, this theory emphasizes the development of dynamic capabilities, specifically, thinking ahead, thinking again, and thinking across, which enable organizations to anticipate, reflect upon, and respond effectively to change. Within the context of CLC governance, these dimensions are critical for enhancing institutional adaptability amid policy uncertainty, resource limitations, and regulatory constraints affecting migrant children. Neo and Chen further underscore that culture, defined as the shared values, norms, and beliefs within public institutions, serves as the foundation of dynamic governance. The principles of integrity, pragmatism, independence, and global relevance are thus essential for building responsive and future-oriented institutions. Consequently, applying Dynamic Governance Theory provides a valuable lens for analyzing the adaptability, innovation, and resilience of CLCs in managing cross-border education for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia.

METHOD

This study adopts a post-positivist research paradigm combined with a qualitative methodological approach. Qualitative inquiry is inherently interpretive, as it seeks to understand social phenomena within their natural contexts through the meanings and perspectives constructed by participants (Creswell, 2013; Neuman, 2014). The post-positivist perspective acknowledges that reality is complex and that absolute or singular truths are unattainable; human behavior cannot be fully captured through purely quantitative means. This paradigm was deemed appropriate for the present study, as the governance of basic education access for the children of Indonesian migrant workers (PMI Children) in Malaysian CLCs represents a multifaceted and context-dependent phenomenon that cannot be adequately explained through one-dimensional approaches. Furthermore, the post-positivist stance allows the researcher to engage closely with the research context and participants, enabling a deeper understanding of lived experiences through direct interaction and interpretation of meaning.

Within the post-positivist framework, research typically begins with a theoretical orientation, followed by systematic data collection and analysis aimed at supporting, refining, or challenging the theoretical propositions (Neuman, 2014). In this study, Dynamic Governance Theory (Neo & Chen, 2007) serves as the conceptual foundation for exploring how adaptive, innovative, and collaborative governance practices emerge within the CLCs system. To enhance the robustness and credibility of the findings, methodological triangulation was employed by integrating multiple sources of data and perspectives (Creswell et al., 1996). The validity of qualitative evidence was strengthened through cross-verification among participants and corroboration with observations and documentary analysis.

This study employs the dynamic governance theory proposed by Neo & Chen (2007). The entire research process was designed to explore the dynamic governance of basic education access for PMI children at CLC in Malaysia, with a specific focus on the dynamic capabilities variable.

The research was conducted in Community Learning Centers located in Sabah and Sarawak, regions that represent the core context of PMI children's education in Malaysia. These sites were purposively selected due to their diverse sociopolitical and institutional conditions, which provide rich empirical insights into the dynamics of educational governance across different plantation areas. Data collection encompassed both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with key informants, conducted either face-to-face or virtually via Zoom, using a guided interview protocol designed to capture nuanced governance practices. Informants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed relevant knowledge and direct experience regarding CLCs governance and educational service delivery. Secondary data consisted of documentary evidence, including policy documents, institutional reports, legal frameworks, and scholarly literature related to migrant education and governance in Malaysia.

Data analysis followed an iterative and inductive process aligned with the qualitative research tradition. The procedures included data preparation, transcription, initial reading, coding, categorization, theme identification, and interpretive synthesis. Analysis was conducted concurrently with data collection to allow emerging insights to inform subsequent stages of inquiry. The iterative nature of this process ensured theoretical alignment with the post-positivist paradigm and maintained analytical rigor. Through this approach, the study sought to construct a holistic and empirically grounded understanding of how dynamic governance operates in facilitating basic education access for Indonesian migrant workers' children in Malaysia.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Findings

The first finding reveals that CLCs have demonstrated a strong capacity for contextual adaptation within their local environments. This adaptive capability is evident in their proactive efforts to conduct needs assessments and anticipate demographic changes among the PMI children. Such foresight has enabled CLCs to plan for the establishment of new centers in previously underserved plantation areas and in communities located beyond plantation zones. Adaptation also extends to curricular design and the use of language in instruction. CLC's teachers employ a hybrid linguistic approach that combines Indonesian and Malay, supplemented with locally relevant examples drawn from everyday Malaysian contexts to facilitate students' comprehension.

In addition, CLCs have innovatively adjusted their pedagogical strategies to mitigate infrastructural limitations. Teachers frequently utilize simple, locally available materials to enhance learning engagement and demonstrate pedagogical flexibility. Regulatory adaptation is another significant aspect, as CLC administrators and stakeholders actively monitor and respond to policy developments in Malaysia that could affect the legality of their operations. These anticipatory measures reflect an institutional awareness of the regulatory environment and a capacity for timely adjustment.

Collectively, these practices illustrate an organizational culture that is agile, reflective, and responsive to environmental shifts, although ongoing legal and administrative constraints

continue to limit the extent of such adaptability. The CLCs' adaptive strategies align closely with the thinking ahead dimension of Dynamic Governance Theory (Neo & Chen, 2007), which emphasizes the importance of foresight and strategic anticipation. This forward-looking orientation is supported by the central government through the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, which has begun to implement data-driven planning, including demographic studies and projections to anticipate rising educational demand among PMI children. This transition marks an important shift from intuition-based to evidence-based policymaking in transnational education governance. However, the full realization of this thinking-ahead capability remains constrained by the absence of geospatial mapping systems and incomplete data on undocumented PMI children, both of which hinder precise educational planning and equitable resource allocation.

The implementation of innovation within CLCs is manifested across multiple dimensions of educational governance. Curriculum innovation has emerged as a central focus, characterized by the contextualization of learning content to align with students' daily experiences. For instance, teachers working on palm oil plantations often introduce scientific concepts, such as the mechanics of pulleys, by relating them to the practical activity of lifting harvested palm fruit, thereby making abstract concepts more tangible and relevant. On the administrative side, CLCs' management has also initiated technical innovations by transitioning student admissions from manual procedures to digital systems using online platforms such as Google Forms, demonstrating a growing openness toward technology integration in school governance.

Efforts to enhance teacher capacity further reinforce this culture of innovation. Each year, CLCs' teachers participate in professional development programs conducted in collaboration with higher education institutions such as the Indonesian University of Education and relevant directorates within the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education. These training initiatives expose teachers to contemporary pedagogical frameworks, including STEM education and Indonesia's Merdeka (Independent) Curriculum. As a result, teachers have shown greater receptivity to adopting new teaching methods and engaging in reflective practice to assess their instructional effectiveness. However, these innovative efforts remain predominantly individual-driven and lack systemic institutionalization. Therefore, a formal policy framework is needed to capture, standardize, and scale successful local innovations, ensuring their sustainability and alignment with national education standards.

The implementation of dynamic capabilities at CLCs is also evident through the institutionalization of reflective governance practices. CLCs' administrators regularly update Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and conduct annual monitoring and evaluation activities to assess program performance. These evaluations encompass teacher effectiveness, curriculum attainment, and overall service quality, and their findings are utilized to guide organizational improvements. Such practices exemplify the thinking dimension of Dynamic Governance Theory (Neo & Chen, 2007), which emphasizes the importance of organizational learning and continuous self-assessment. Nevertheless, the full potential of this reflective culture is constrained by limited financial resources and weak regulatory frameworks that hinder the implementation of more comprehensive reforms.

Another critical dynamic capability observed within CLCs governance is the ability to collaborate and learn across institutional and national boundaries. This thinking across capability extends beyond conventional partnership models; it represents an ongoing process of co-learning and shared problem-solving among diverse stakeholders. The governance structure of CLCs involves multiple actors, including the Indonesian Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Indonesia's diplomatic representatives in Malaysia, local Malaysian authorities, plantation companies, and Indonesian community organizations. These multi-sectoral collaborations have facilitated the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices, thereby strengthening the adaptive and integrative capacity of CLCs to operate within a transnational and multicultural environment.

At the operational level, institutional collaboration with domestic higher educational institutions plays a critical role in ensuring the sustainability of CLCs. A strategic partnership with The Open University (Universitas Terbuka, UT) exemplifies this collaboration, as the institution provides distance-learning undergraduate programs to train mentor teachers, thereby

expanding the pool of qualified educators within plantation-based learning environments. CLCs also collaborate with Malaysian agencies in specific educational and cultural initiatives, such as partnerships with the Malaysian Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection to organize cultural performances. One notable example is the student angklung ensemble, which has not only enhanced students' self-confidence but also fostered intercultural understanding and strengthened community relations. In addition, CLCs have incorporated local elements from Malaysian extracurricular education, particularly scouting activities, by integrating Malaysian training approaches with Indonesia's national scouting curriculum, enriching students' social learning experiences through cultural hybridization.

This collaborative approach also extends to community participation through community-based education programs that encourage parental and local involvement in school activities. Moreover, CLCs have selectively adopted pedagogical elements from Malaysian educational practices to complement Indonesian learning standards, creating a cross-learning environment that promotes knowledge exchange across institutional and national boundaries. Consequently, CLCs function not merely as educational service providers but as platforms for cross-sectoral and cross-national collaboration, facilitating continuous learning among stakeholders. Multi-actor coordination is particularly evident in the recruitment and selection of teachers, where the Indonesian Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education, Indonesian diplomatic representatives (KBRI/KJRI), and CLC administrators jointly conduct interviews and competency assessments to ensure the quality and suitability of teaching staff. These collaborative mechanisms demonstrate the operational embodiment of thinking across dimensions in Dynamic Governance Theory (Neo & Chen, 2007), emphasizing inter-organizational learning and integration across systems.

Overall, the implementation of adaptation, innovation, and collaboration within CLCs reflects a gradual movement toward dynamic governance. CLCs have shown the capacity to institutionalize learning processes derived from field experiences through mechanisms such as the regular updating of Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and internal monitoring systems. However, these dynamic capabilities remain underdeveloped due to persistent structural and legal constraints, particularly the ambiguous institutional status of CLCs and their teachers, which limit their capacity for broader policy innovation and organizational flexibility. Strengthening legal recognition and institutional legitimacy is therefore crucial for enhancing the adaptive and transformative potential of CLCs in ensuring sustainable educational governance for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia.

Discussion

Dynamic governance represents a form of governance that transcends regulatory compliance by emphasizing an organization's capacity for continuous learning, adaptation, and renewal in response to environmental complexity and change. According to Neo and Chen (2007), dynamic governance operates through three interrelated dimensions: thinking ahead, thinking again, and thinking across, which collectively enable organizations to anticipate, reflect, and collaborate effectively in managing uncertainty. Within this framework, dynamic capabilities are conceptualized as organizational competencies that support sustained adaptability, innovation, and inter-organizational collaboration (Teece, Pisano, & Shuen, 1997). Neo and Chen (2007) further contend that culture embodied in shared values, norms, and institutional identity constitutes the foundational element that shapes and sustains these dynamic capabilities. Thus, the practice of dynamic governance requires public institutions and their actors not only to anticipate future challenges, conduct systematic reflection and evaluation, and build cross-sectoral networks, but also to internalize shared cultural values that anchor decision-making in contexts of institutional complexity. This theoretical framework provides a critical lens for analyzing the governance of CLCs in Malaysia, where adaptation, innovation, and collaboration are not merely conceptual ideals but manifest as pragmatic responses to real-world constraints.

Managing CLCs in Malaysia demands high levels of dynamic capability, particularly the capacity to adapt, innovate, and collaborate to sustain their operations within volatile and transnational environments. Existing literature underscores that dynamic capabilities are essential

for organizational resilience and performance in turbulent contexts (Ismail, Suyanto, & Ariffin, 2022; Loganathan et al., 2023). This suggests that the success of an educational institution is determined not solely by material or financial resources but by the agility and strategic responsiveness of its actors in navigating uncertainty. The empirical findings from this study reveal that CLCs have operationalized the three dimensions of dynamic capabilities through various contextually relevant strategies, illustrating how these dimensions function in practice. This observation aligns with Teece et al. (1997), who emphasize that dynamic capabilities become most visible in resource-constrained organizations that continue to innovate through creative problem-solving and adaptive learning.

Within the framework of Dynamic Governance, Neo and Chen (2007) emphasize the intrinsic linkage between dynamic capabilities and organizational culture, asserting that culture serves as the foundational layer that enables these capabilities to develop and function effectively. In the context of PMI children in Sabah and Sarawak, this relationship between governance and culture becomes particularly salient. Growing up in a Malaysian socio-cultural and educational environment exposes these children to identity shifts that may weaken their sense of belonging to Indonesia. Prior studies indicate that many PMI children who have spent their formative years on Malaysian plantations experience a gradual erosion of their Indonesian national identity, largely due to limited educational exposure to Indonesian language, culture, and civic values (Suwarno et al., 2021). Recognizing this challenge, CLCs have incorporated cultural and national identity formation into their curriculum and extracurricular activities, ensuring that education serves not only an academic but also a sociocultural and nation-building function. This underscores that dynamic governance in education extends beyond technical or managerial adaptation; it encompasses the preservation and transmission of cultural identity as an integral aspect of institutional sustainability.

In the transnational education context of PMI children in Malaysia, the cultivation of nationalism functions as both a pedagogical and governance imperative. Living in a distinct social and cultural setting requires targeted efforts to maintain students' emotional and symbolic connection to their homeland. Through CLCs, the Indonesian government seeks to instill national values, cultural knowledge, and civic identity, thereby reinforcing students' awareness of belonging to the Indonesian nation. Nationalism, as conceptualized by Muawanah (2015), represents not only loyalty and integrity toward one's homeland but also a collective sense of purpose and shared identity cultivated through education. This perspective aligns with educational theories that regard schools as key sites for identity formation and civic socialization, particularly among diaspora or transnational communities.

To maintain this national connection, CLCs consistently implement Indonesia's national curriculum and use Bahasa Indonesia as the primary language of instruction. Research has demonstrated that the use of Indonesian linguistic and symbolic elements, such as national uniforms, curriculum design, and classroom discourse, contributes to fostering a collective sense of Indonesian identity among students (Tohari, 2024). Many PMI children who previously identified more closely with local Malaysian norms have, through CLC education, developed an understanding of Indonesia's language, history, and national ideology. Subjects such as Pancasila, Bahasa Indonesia, and Indonesian history play a critical role in reconstructing their sense of national belonging. This reflects that the educational mission of CLCs extends beyond literacy and numeracy outcomes to encompass identity preservation and cultural continuity for Indonesian children abroad.

Cultural and extracurricular activities further reinforce this process of identity formation. Through learning Indonesian regional songs, stories of national heroes, and participating in Indonesian-style scouting, flag ceremonies, and Independence Day celebrations, CLC students internalize the symbols and narratives of national pride. These rituals not only build a sense of community but also create emotional attachment to the homeland. As one CLC administrator described, "These children sing Indonesia Raya with great solemnity; they are proud, even though they live on palm oil plantations." Such expressions of symbolic nationalism demonstrate how CLCs recreate an Indonesian cultural atmosphere within a foreign environment. The findings of Tohari (2024) corroborate this, showing that shared cultural symbols such as language, history,

and collective rituals reinforce national attachment among diaspora children. In essence, CLCs function as cultural enclaves or “oases of Indonesian identity” that preserve the continuity of national consciousness within a transnational setting. Theoretically, this suggests that nationalism operates not only as an educational outcome but also as a governance instrument that legitimizes CLCs’ role and strengthens their social position within migrant communities.

CLC teachers play a critical role in shaping the aspirations and motivations of Indonesian migrant workers’ (PMI) children by encouraging them to pursue further education rather than following their parents into manual labor (Tohari, 2024). Complementing these efforts, the Indonesian government provides opportunities for CLC graduates to continue their studies in Indonesia through the Secondary Education Affirmation Scholarship (Afirmasi Pendidikan Menengah, ADEM) program. This initiative aims to reintegrate the younger generation of PMI into Indonesia’s national education system, thereby strengthening their connection to their homeland and reinforcing their sense of national identity (Tohari, 2024). Empirical evidence suggests that the scholarship has been effective in motivating students to study harder and aspire toward higher education. Case studies reveal that this form of educational repatriation fosters stronger national attachment and cultivates civic responsibility, as many ADEM recipients return to Sabah or Sarawak to share their educational experiences in Indonesia, inspiring peers and influencing parents to consider repatriation for their children’s future. Through such initiatives, the CLC functions as both an educational and cultural institution that fosters nationalism and civic awareness among PMI children through the Indonesian curriculum and pedagogy.

The cultural dimension of Dynamic Governance emphasizes that shared values, beliefs, and identities form the foundation upon which dynamic capabilities, adaptation, innovation, and collaboration can effectively develop (Neo & Chen, 2007). Within the CLC context, the Indonesian national identity, embedded through the use of the national curriculum, language, and symbols, serves as a unifying cultural force that links migrant children to their homeland. Efforts to cultivate nationalism through the Indonesian language, national celebrations, and the ADEM scholarship program reflect an organizational culture intentionally designed to preserve identity and strengthen emotional ties to Indonesia. This aligns with research asserting that education plays a vital role in sustaining national identity among diaspora communities (Loganathan et al., 2023; Ismail, 2022; Suwarno et al., 2021). The values of nationalism and identity embedded within CLC practices represent the institutional internalization of culture, which enhances the organization’s capacity for adaptation, reflection, and collaboration. Thus, culture functions not only as a social glue but also as a strategic asset that reinforces dynamic governance within CLCs. Strengthening organizational culture can therefore be viewed as a long-term strategy for enhancing institutional resilience amid ongoing legal, political, and cross-national complexities.

Despite these positive developments, significant governance and implementation challenges persist in providing basic education for PMI children through CLCs. These challenges center on five interrelated areas: legal status, accessibility, quality, socio-cultural integration, and sustainability of CLC graduates. Among these, legal uncertainty represents the most critical structural barrier that undermines the long-term viability of dynamic governance practices within CLCs. In Sabah, for example, CLCs operate under temporary permits and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) that require periodic informal renewal. The absence of a formal legal framework restricts access to Malaysian government assistance and limits institutional development. In Indonesia, CLC governance is still guided primarily by ministerial decrees rather than comprehensive legislation, resulting in institutional ambiguity and dependency on local Malaysian authorities’ discretionary policies.

Moreover, a considerable proportion of CLC students lack civil documentation, as many were born in Malaysia to undocumented parents. Existing studies confirm that the absence of legal identity, such as birth certificates or passports, remains the fundamental cause of migrant children’s vulnerability and restricted access to formal education (Loganathan et al., 2021). Without official documentation, these children face difficulties enrolling in Malaysian schools and encounter administrative barriers when attempting to continue their education in Indonesia. CLCs themselves struggle to officially register undocumented students, despite recent efforts by Indonesia’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs to implement the Single Identification Number (Nomor

Induk Tunggal, NIT) policy. While this initiative marks an important step forward, its implementation remains nascent. Until documentation is systematically managed, issues such as the inability to issue official diplomas, register students under Indonesia's National Student Identification Number (Nomor Induk Siswa Nasional, NISN*), and ensure continuity of education upon return to Indonesia will persist. This legal ambiguity also has psychosocial implications, as undocumented children often feel unrecognized by both countries, which can erode their sense of belonging and motivation to learn.

A major challenge confronting CLCs in Malaysia lies in their limited coverage and capacity to meet the educational needs of all PMI children. The existing number of CLCs in Sabah and Sarawak remains insufficient to reach the entire population of school-aged migrant children (Wulan et al., 2022). Many plantation areas, particularly those located in remote and geographically dispersed regions, still lack CLC facilities, leaving thousands of children without access to any form of educational service. This limited reach is primarily attributed to geographical isolation, inadequate infrastructure, and the scarcity of qualified human resources. The result is a fragmented educational landscape where access is uneven, depending heavily on the presence and initiative of plantation companies and Indonesian government representatives.

Teacher recruitment and deployment present another significant challenge. The number of officially appointed mentor teachers sent from Indonesia is severely limited, creating a dependency on local recruitment by plantation companies. In many cases, these locally hired teachers possess only secondary-level education, which constrains pedagogical quality and instructional depth. The high student teacher ratio, with a single teacher often responsible for multiple grade levels and subjects, further hampers individualized learning and effective classroom management. Physical constraints exacerbate the problem; some CLCs combine several grade levels within a single classroom due to inadequate space. These structural weaknesses are largely rooted in limited financial and institutional support. The establishment of new CLCs and the recruitment of additional teachers depend on the combined commitment of the Indonesian government and private plantation companies. Without an integrated public-private financing and recruitment framework, ensuring a sustainable supply of qualified educators remains difficult. The shortage of trained teachers also weakens the system's capacity to sustain curriculum adaptation and pedagogical innovation over time.

In addition to infrastructural limitations, maintaining educational quality poses a persistent challenge, particularly concerning teacher qualifications and curriculum implementation. Many supervising teachers lack formal pedagogical credentials, which affects instructional effectiveness. Although periodic training sessions are provided, continuous professional development (CPD) remains limited and fragmented. To enhance teaching quality, a competency-based CPD roadmap is recommended, one that integrates micro-credentials, blended learning, and ongoing mentoring to reduce reliance on short-term, ad hoc workshops. Strengthening teachers' professional competencies is critical to linking educational inputs (teacher preparedness) with outputs (student learning outcomes and successful academic transitions).

Curriculum adaptation represents another core quality concern. While CLCs adopt the Indonesian national curriculum, the sociocultural context in Malaysia differs substantially, resulting in knowledge gaps in subjects such as Indonesian geography, civics, and history. Teachers are required to bridge these gaps through contextualized instruction while preserving the integrity of national content. The risk of "curricular dissonance" becomes evident when students transition back to Indonesia for further education, as they may face both academic and cultural adjustment difficulties. As one CLC teacher explained, "Students often struggle when they return to Indonesia; for example, they are unfamiliar with historical landmarks like temples, which they have never seen in Malaysia." This highlights the dual challenge of balancing local contextualization with the preservation of essential Indonesian content necessary for cross-border educational mobility.

This issue is particularly salient because most CLCs are authorized only to provide education up to the elementary and junior secondary levels, leaving a gap in the educational pathway. The tension between contextual relevance and curricular alignment reflects broader debates in transnational education about maintaining academic equivalence across systems.

Similar findings in diaspora education research underscore the importance of academic and cultural “bridging mechanisms” to facilitate re-entry into the home country’s education system. To address this, the study recommends the introduction of structured bridging modules including cultural orientation, enrichment programs in Indonesian social studies and geography, diagnostic assessments, and credit mapping to mitigate re-entry shock and ensure smoother academic continuity for returning students. Such measures would not only enhance learning outcomes but also strengthen the long-term sustainability of dynamic governance practices within the CLC network.

Governance challenges within CLCs are not solely institutional or legal in nature but are also deeply rooted in social and cultural factors. One of the persistent issues is the limited parental awareness of the value of education among some PMI families. Evidence from Kota Kinabalu indicates that certain parents remain reluctant to send their children to school, preferring that they assist with plantation work instead. This tendency is largely shaped by economic hardship, job insecurity, and short-term survival strategies, which prioritize immediate income over long-term educational investment. Consequently, CLC enrollment figures often fall short of the actual number of school-age children, as many are engaged in informal labor or remain at home. The degree of community support for education also varies substantially across regions: in some locations, migrant communities have successfully established self-funded CLCs, whereas in others, such initiatives depend entirely on the involvement of plantation companies. These socio-cultural dynamics act as mediating variables that influence the effectiveness of education access policies, even where infrastructure and institutional support exist.

Structural challenges also emerge at the post junior secondary level, where educational opportunities for CLC graduates remain limited. CLCs currently provide education only up to the junior high school level, creating a discontinuity in the educational pathway. Graduates who wish to pursue senior secondary education have few viable options: enrolling in the Indonesian School of Kota Kinabalu (SIKK) or continuing through distance learning programs. However, limited capacity at SIKK and the high costs of education in Malaysia constrain these pathways. The Indonesian government’s scholarship, ADEM, offers a critical yet highly competitive opportunity for selected CLC graduates to continue their studies in Indonesia. While this program has successfully reintegrated some students into Indonesia’s education system, its reach remains limited due to funding and selection constraints. As a result, many graduates remain in Malaysia and enter the plantation workforce, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of poverty and social immobility. This truncation of educational progression effectively closes the pipeline between lower and upper secondary education, undermining the long-term impact of CLC initiatives.

This constraint is consistent with cross-national research on migrant and refugee education, which identifies the transition from lower to upper secondary as a key dropout point, particularly among children without formal citizenship status. To strengthen educational continuity, several interventions are recommended: expanding the ADEM quotas; implementing host-family schemes for returning students; and establishing private tuition support mechanisms to ensure affordability. These strategies would support social mobility while sustaining CLC governance through inclusive and adaptive education systems.

The challenges outlined above underscore the multidimensional nature of education governance for migrant children, confirming that barriers exist at multiple, interdependent levels, legal, institutional, and socio-cultural. Field findings from this study align with previous research demonstrating that undocumented migrant children face intersecting legal, economic, and social obstacles to education (Wulan et al., 2022). Addressing these challenges requires a dynamic, multi-level governance approach that integrates cross-border, cross-sector, and community-based collaboration. Policy responses must therefore operate simultaneously at several levels: (i) regulatory improvement, through stronger legal frameworks and mutual recognition of documentation between Indonesia and Malaysia; (ii) institutional strengthening, by enhancing teacher quality, infrastructure, and curriculum alignment; (iii) community empowerment, through behavioral change communication and support; and (iv) data driven planning, utilizing the NIT and geospatial mapping for targeted service delivery.

Furthermore, a reconfiguration of governance architecture is essential to ensure the sustainability of CLCs. This includes establishing public and private funding to secure financing for students from junior to senior secondary education and formalizing bilateral cooperation for the recognition of CLC credentials. Such reforms would align CLC governance with the principles of Dynamic Governance (Neo & Chen, 2007), emphasizing adaptability, institutional learning, and cross-sectoral coordination. Ultimately, ensuring inclusive and sustainable education for PMI children requires a form of governance that is not only regulatory but also anticipatory, reflective, and collaborative, one capable of navigating the complexities of transnational education across social, political, and cultural boundaries.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates how CLCs in Malaysia have operationalized the principles of Dynamic Governance in addressing the educational needs of PMI children. Through the implementation of adaptive, innovative, reflective, and collaborative practices, CLCs have exhibited the capacity to anticipate demographic shifts, contextualize curricula, enhance teacher competencies, and foster multi-actor partnerships. These adaptive mechanisms reflect the thinking ahead, thinking again, and thinking across dimensions articulated by Neo and Chen (2007), underscoring the importance of institutional agility and inter-organizational learning in transnational education governance. Furthermore, the cultural dimension, particularly the preservation of the Indonesian language, identity, and national values, functions as a critical enabling factor that anchors these dynamic capabilities. It ensures that education within CLCs is not only accessible and relevant but also identity-affirming for Indonesian children growing up in a foreign socio-cultural environment.

Despite these positive developments, substantial governance challenges persist. Issues related to legality, institutional capacity, teacher recruitment, curriculum quality, and long-term sustainability continue to constrain the full realization of dynamic governance principles within CLCs. The findings suggest that effective policy interventions should prioritize the strengthening of legal recognition, expansion of educational coverage, improvement of teacher development frameworks, and enhancement of cross-border coordination between Indonesian and Malaysian authorities. Embedding Dynamic Governance principles into policy design and implementation can foster greater institutional resilience, inclusivity, and sustainability, ensuring that the right to education for all migrant children is upheld within complex cross-national contexts. Strengthening the legal status and cross-border governance framework of CLCs is imperative to ensure their long-term institutional sustainability and equitable access for all Indonesian migrant children. Policymakers should pursue bilateral agreements that formalize CLC recognition, harmonize documentation procedures, and facilitate mutual support between Indonesia and Malaysia.

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