

MANAGING UNSKILLED MIGRANT LABOUR: LANGUAGE DIVERSITY IN MULTICULTURAL SOUTH EAST ASIAN SOCIETIES

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Abstract

This study examines how language diversity is managed at the individual, community, and national level, and the extent to which language diversity management impacts on local people and migrant workers in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore. The results will serve as the basis for recommendations to Thailand and other ASEAN countries. Qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews were used in this study. The findings show that Thailand provides for migrant workers and their children in terms of formal and informal education, health care services, work place regulation, and interpreter support. In Malaysia and Singapore, some NGOs and the private sector provide a few English courses and skill development options, but, unlike Thailand, no support for special programmes is provided. This study suggests that, for Thailand, the official and private sectors should consider offering “language competence compensation” to supplement public service salaries to encourage more Thais to learn other languages, particularly Burmese-Thai/Mon-Thai, so that they can be trained to be interpreters. In addition, the study suggests that curricula for migrant children that are mutually acceptable in both Thailand and Myanmar should be designed; and a “Migrant Workers Fund” should be set up for migrant well-being and development. ASEAN countries, should adopt a fair and ‘win-win’ strategy for recruiting migrant workers in both sending and receiving countries, and ASEAN should consider applying a multilingual policy bloc-wide.

Keywords: unskilled migrant workers, language diversity, multicultural societies, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore

Introduction

The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community in 2015 has further heightened long-standing trends of labour migration within Southeast Asia. According to the World Bank, the three ASEAN countries receiving the highest number of ASEAN labour migrants are Thailand (55% of total migrants), Malaysia (22%), and Singapore (19%) (Testaverde, Moroz, Hollweg, & Schmillen, 2017, p. 2). All three countries share social factors that attract migrant workers, including aging societies, dangerous, dirty and difficult (3D) jobs refusal, and dramatic demographical changes. The mobility of skilled and unskilled migrant workers has been agreed upon in principle within the ASEAN Community, so migration is mostly from the “push” countries to the “pull” countries, spurred by the impetus to earn a better living. Although the three countries have different volumes and types of industrial economics, they also need migrant workers under different conditions, and have different regulations and laws for taking care of these people. Skilled migrant workers may not confront many problems, but unskilled migrant workers certainly do, in particular, the language barrier. As stated by Trajkovski and Loosemore (2006, cited in Nurul Azita Binti Salleh, 2012), “Language is a barrier for communication, whether verbal or written, when presenting information to the foreign workers. This makes presentation of work orders by the employer difficult as the workers do not understand them”. According to the study of Nurul Azita Binti Salleh (2012), in Australia, Singapore, and the United Kingdom (UK), language problems among foreign workers affect occupational safety and health.

In Thailand, apart from work safety and health problems like those stated above, the new migrant workers who cannot communicate in Thai may be abused, and become victims of harassment and violence by various adversaries. Therefore, language is an important tool for everybody to communicate and understand each other.

This paper will present in brief the labour policies of Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore, as well as the ways in which migrant workers, host country people, and local organisations react and adjust towards each other in terms of language and education.

Objectives of the Study

The following are the objectives of this study:

- 1) To examine how language diversity is managed on the individual, community, national, and ASEAN levels.
- 2) To analyse the impact of managing language diversity on local people and migrant workers in the three countries.
- 3) To offer suggestions on language policy guidelines and implementation for Thailand and other ASEAN countries.

Methodology

Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore are the most active countries for migration in Southeast Asia in which Thailand and Malaysia are both sending and receiving countries while Singapore is only a receiving country. Therefore, these three countries were selected for this project, which followed qualitative research methods including in-depth interviews that were conducted as follows:

Thailand: Interviews were conducted with 28 migrant workers from Myanmar (both ethnic Mon and ethnic Myanmar people) in Samut Sakhon Province, 18 representatives from various Thai government offices in Samut Sakhon, and staff from 2 NGOs including some private companies related to migrant workers.

Malaysia: Interviews were conducted with migrant workers consisting of 12 Thais, 5 Bangladeshis, 4 Vietnamese, 4 Indonesians, 4 Rohingya, and 2 ethnic Kachin (Myanmar), as well as 21 representatives from Malaysian government offices/institutions/NGOs and Malaysian locals.

Singapore: Interviews were conducted with migrant workers consisting of 13 Thais, 5 Bangladeshis, 7 Burmese, and 1 Indian, as well as 9 representatives from Singaporean communities, institutions, and businesses.

Concept Used in this Article

Stewart (1968) outlines ten functional domains in language planning as follows:

Official - An official language “function[s] as a legally appropriate language for all politically and culturally representative purposes on a nationwide basis. The official function of a language is often specified in a constitution.

Provincial - A provincial language functions as an official language for a geographic area smaller than a nation, typically a province or region (e.g., French in Quebec).

Wider communication - A language of wider communication is a language that may be official or provincial, but, more importantly, functions as a

medium of communication across language boundaries within a nation (e.g., Hindi in India; Swahili language in East Africa).

International - An international language functions as a medium of communication across national boundaries (e.g., English).

Capital - A capital language functions as a prominent language in and around a national capital (e.g., Dutch and French in Brussels).

Group - A group language functions as a conventional language among the members of a single cultural or ethnic group (e.g., Hebrew amongst the Jews).

Educational - An educational language functions as a medium of instruction in primary and secondary schools on a regional or national basis (Urdu in West Pakistan and Bengali in East Pakistan).

School subject - A school subject language is a language that is taught as a subject in secondary school or higher education (e.g., Latin and Ancient Greek in English schools).

Literary - A literary language functions as a language for literary or scholarly purposes (Ancient Greek).

Religious - A religious language functions as a language for the ritual purposes of a particular religion (e.g., Latin for the Latin Rite within the Roman Catholic Church; Arabic for the reading of the Qur'an).

Language Policy at the ASEAN Level

With regard to language, the ASEAN Charter references language in the following Articles:

Article 2: Principles: Respect for the different cultures, languages and religions of the people of ASEAN, while emphasizing their common values in the spirit of unity in diversity.

Article 34: Working language of ASEAN: The working language of ASEAN shall be English.

Literature Review

Although Thailand is a multilingual country, government policies only focus on Standard Thai as the national language. English and other languages, such as Mandarin, Japanese, Lao, Khmer, French, German, etc. are treated as external languages that link Thailand to the world. Smalley (1988, p. 254) explained that the hierarchy of languages was fixed in Thailand because of a 'power' struggle for communication in a situation where there are numerous languages competing

for linguistic and cultural assimilation. Officials from Bangkok working in outlying areas often do not understand the hierarchy of multilingualism at work, and seek to belittle, diminish or eradicate ethnic and linguistic differences, whether they are regional, marginal, or enclave. They do not realize that the supremacy of Standard Thai does not require the extinction of other languages (Smalley, 1988, p. 255).

Regarding migrant workers, since the 1980s, Thailand has seen an influx of migrant workers from Myanmar for work in 3D jobs. These migrant workers are often accompanied by their children or have children in Thailand, so the Thai government is obligated to provide them with education, which is their basic right. However, UNESCO's director in Bangkok, Maki Hayakishiwa, has stated that millions of primary school-aged children worldwide - including Thailand - lack access to learning in a language they understand, and this remains an "invisible barrier" to education. It is time, therefore, for our policymakers to rethink the education policy and take concepts and principles like pluralism and inclusivity into consideration (*The Nation*, 2018; Chantavanich & Vungsiriphisal, 2012).

According to the statistics, as of October 2018, there were 1,870,715 registered migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos (Department of Employment, 2018). Good relations between the business owners and the migrant workers can create a better understanding and good experiences among them. However, bias through ethnicity and the unequal status of migrant workers cannot be denied as they are not Thai. There are no business owners who communicate in the language(s) of any migrant worker, therefore, migrant workers have to learn Thai for their survival in Thailand. Moreover, their way of life, hygiene practices, and cultures differ from each other. Both should learn about the other's cultural daily life from each other, including the rights of children to education (Srikham, 2013; Rungmanee, 2017).

Malaysia and Singapore are good examples of multicultural societies. In Malaysia, 50.4% of the population are Malay, 23.7% Chinese, 11% indigenous peoples, 7.1% Indian, and 7.8% other races. In Singapore, 74.1% of the population are Chinese, 13.4% Malay, 9.2% Indian, and 3.3% other races. "Ethnicity" has been incorporated into Malaysia's central policies, whereas Singapore prefers to manage cultural identities on the basis of a multicultural ideology (Berry & Kalin, 1995; Berry, Kalin, & Taylor, 1977, cited in Noor & Leong, 2013).

Malaysia promotes language pluralism with around 138 languages, including the languages of immigrants, such as Burmese, Rohingya, Punjabi, Telugu, Malayalam, Cham, Syiheti, Sinhala, etc. Moreover, in Sabah and

Sarawak, there are Filipino refugees, undocumented migrants, plantation workers, and Bajau Laut (sea gypsies of Southeast Asia). Karunan (2016) proposed that, because language policy impacts on the socio-economic, ethnic, cultural, and linguistic diversity, and tensions in Malaysia, it should be based on success stories/good practices related to curriculum innovation, teaching, and the pedagogies practiced by nongovernment entities - especially in Sabah and Sarawak - using "top-down" and "bottom-up" implementation.

Singapore is a multilingual society with six different languages spoken by at least 10% of Singaporean students. According to Schweinberger's study (2015), 80% of speakers (university students) are bi- or trilingual, with about 5% of speakers being fluent in five or more languages. He concludes that as a multilingual society that today consists of mainly bi- and trilingual individuals, Singapore has promoted a substantial language shift through its language policies. This has led to a considerable decline in linguistic diversity, and after more than 50 years of bilingual policy emphasizing English and Mandarin Chinese as L1, there has been a dramatic decrease in the use of Chinese dialects (Schweinberger, 2015).

Findings

The situation of unskilled migrant workers in Thailand

Labour policy

Various factors in Thailand, the host country, create a high demand for migrant workers to supplement a diminishing local workforce. By virtue of the Immigration Act (1979) and Foreign Workers Act (1978), the Thai government granted illegal immigrants the right for temporary employment and residence as they await repatriation. Beginning in 1992, Thai businesses started hiring migrant workers from Myanmar to work in nine border provinces, including Chiang Rai, Chiang Mai, Kanchanaburi, Tak, Ranong, Prachuap Khiri Khan, Mae Hong Son, and Ratchaburi. In 1996, Laos and Cambodia were included as well, increasing the number of provinces involved to 43 and including sea fishing as one of the industries in which migrants could be employed. In 1998, 54 provinces and 47 business sectors were included (Kerdmongkhon, 2007a).

After 1998, labour policies changed yearly until 2001 when migrant workers could be hired in all 76 provinces in ten business sectors. In 2002, the ten business sectors able to hire migrant workers were consolidated to six. In 2014, the Thai government attempted to manage migrant workers systematically by inviting all migrant workers with or without work permits, including family

members, to register with the Ministry of Internal Affairs and obtain work permits from the Ministry of Labour. The migrants were expected to have proof of nationality and passports issued by their home countries (Kerdmongkhon, 2007a).

However, as Thailand was criticized by some foreign institutions for human trafficking violations, in July 2017, the military government launched the Foreign Workers Management Decree. An amendment of the Penal Code in Section 4, Section 101 was made. Previously, for foreign workers working in the country without a licence, the penalty was not to exceed 5 years or a fine of 10,000 to 100,000 baht, however, this was changed to 5,000 to 50,000 baht without the penalty of imprisonment. Similarly, Section 102, which pertains to employers receiving a foreign worker without a work permit, was changed from the original penalty of 400,000 to 800,000 baht per worker to a fine of 10,000 to 100,000 baht per worker. Furthermore, if the employer repeats the offences, there will be a penalty of not more than one year, and the offender will not be able to hire foreign workers for 3 years (PPTV HD 36, 2018).

As of November 2018, in Thailand, registered migrant workers from Myanmar, Cambodia, and Laos numbered around 3,897,598 (Harkins, 2019, p. 12). Migrant workers can be hired for two-year contracts, which may be extended for two more years. However, the maximum time that a registered migrant labourer can legally work in Thailand should not exceed four years.

Language policy of Thailand

In 2006, the Royal Institute (whose name was changed to “Royal Society” in 2015) formed the Committee to Draft the National Language Policy (CDNLP). The purpose of the committee was to research the language situation in Thailand and submit a policy that would benefit the Kingdom and all its people (Warotamasikkhadit & Person, 2011). There were six sub-committees to address the following issues:

1. Thai language policy for Thai students and Thai nationals including foreigners who learn Thai as a foreign language;
2. Regional languages policy including Tai language family and ethnic minority languages;
3. Languages of commerce, neighbouring languages, and working languages policy;
4. Policy for translation, interpretation, and localization standards;
5. Language policy for migrants seeking employment in Thailand; and

6. Language needs of the visual and hearing impaired.

The National Language Policy draft was approved by two former prime ministers, Abhisit Vejjajiva in 2010 and Yingluck Shinawatra in 2012. Both prime ministers also authorized the Royal Institute to develop a strategic implementation plan.

The strategic implementation plan of the National Language Policy (2017-2021) is an important instrument for national economic and social development, which will hopefully lead to a long-term vision of improving Thailand's "Stability, Prosperity, and Sustainability".

Under the MOU, some migrant workers receive an orientation to life in Thailand. These may be provided by Thai businesses or NGOs along the Myanmar border or in Samut Sakhon Province. However, language and culture training are not part of most migrants' experience. Thai businesses generally rely on interpreters to communicate with migrant workers, and there is no research on how the language factor impacts migrants and local people. The following section reflects language use within Samut Sakhon Province.

Language used by migrant workers and the locals

Thai is the national language of Thailand, while English and Chinese are the most used foreign languages. Globally, host countries tend to treat migrant workers not as humans deserving equal rights but rather as 'Homo-economicus' (Kerdmongkhol, 2007b; Luangaramsri, 2017; Photikanit, Sirasoonthorn, & Buddharaksa, 2017) - economic resources. Migrant workers must adjust according to the requirements of their hosts. In the case of migrant workers from Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Myanmar to Thailand, the Thai people who deal with migrant workers have no interest in learning their language(s) and culture(s). Therefore, the language barrier is one of the main factors affecting their wellbeing (or lack thereof) in Thailand. Thus, the migrant workers need to develop strategies for coping with Thai as a working language in various domains in the private and public sectors, as well as everyday interactions with Thai people, as will be discussed in the next section.

Local Thai authorities' domain

In the past, all documents related to migrant workers were only written in Thai, and the only spoken language used with local authorities was Thai. However, through decades of working with migrants, the Thai authorities have become aware of the need for bilingual documents and interpreters. Indeed, the Ministry

of Foreign Affairs (2018) policies now require, "...that standard employment contracts must be done in two languages, one of which must be the language that the employee understands..."

Hence, many local administrative offices, such as police stations, hospitals, labour offices, Immigration Police offices, and municipal halls now provide bilingual signs (Thai and Burmese languages). Burmese language brochures on migrant worker rights are sometimes available. Some Thai officers know a few Burmese or Mon words (and may have attended Burmese language courses) but our research team could not find any Thai officer who could communicate in Burmese or Mon fluently without an interpreter. This is a weakness of Thai people. Thai government officials routinely transfer to other locations, so there is little motivation to learn the language of migrant workers since the officials may soon take up assignments elsewhere. In addition, interpreters are relatively easy to find in places like Samut Sakhon Province.

Interpreters are provided in all government offices, including in the courts. Moreover, some official documents and government websites have been translated into Burmese and Mon, although the accuracy of the information needs checking by experts.

Nonetheless, the provincial authorities of Samut Sakhon understand the advantages of living in a multicultural society and promote multicultural awareness by providing space for multiple ethnic groups to set up booths in fairs and public events - something that was prohibited in the past. This shows that both the government sector and local people are growing in their understanding and acceptance of the cultural diversity brought by migrant workers.

In the future, mother tongue smartphone apps could be developed to facilitate easier communication between Thai people and migrant workers.

Work and living domains

Migrant workers mostly come to Thailand through the persuasion of their friends or acquaintances and rarely come alone. People from the same ethnic group, such as Mon, Karen, Shan, Dawei, Pa-o, and Burmese, will try to find work and stay together at the beginning, which helps their adjustment. They generally need to learn at least some Thai for their work. The ways that migrants cope with and learn Thai include the following:

- (a) from their Thai employers;
- (b) from Thai co-workers;
- (c) from short courses offered by NGOs;

(d) from phrase books: One migrant worker showed us a Burmese-Thai phrasebook written by a Burmese person. She told us that she practiced these conversations with her Thai boss daily. Within three months, she could communicate some Thai words. She also practiced writing the Thai alphabet every day, and within one month, she had acquired basic Thai literacy. Later, she learned and practiced regularly, and her fluency increased, and, as a result, she was promoted to oversee the work of other migrants;

(e) from TV channels (viewed in their hometowns and/or in Thailand); and

(f) from Thai songs and Thai Karaoke.

In many factories, Burmese language courses are also provided to Thai managerial level staff, but with little success. Most factories continue to depend on interpreters for communication between Thai and migrant workers. Some important instructions and information about their rights are presented in both Thai and their own language. It would be wonderful if the migrant workers could learn the Thai language and culture before coming, but there is currently no system to help them do so. Nevertheless, migrant workers informed us that within six months, most can communicate at least a little in Thai. Their Thai proficiency depends on how long they have been in Thailand, although most migrant workers who have not attended any Thai language courses or done self-study only learn some spoken Thai.

The Thai authorities and the private sector both heed the language competence of the officers and the migrant workers. Many local government offices, universities, and NGOs try their best to empower language competence for both Thai and migrant workers. For example, the Office of the Non-Formal Education Commission provides Burmese language training courses for Thai people and Thai language courses for migrant workers. Those who are able to manage their time well and are serious about their study can advance to high levels. Some can pursue their studies at the undergraduate level. However, most migrant workers only intend to earn money. They do not have time to spend on further training courses. Some successful migrant workers hope to upgrade their Thai language skills, such as one informant who explained, "Whoever can speak and read Thai won't be cheated" (interview with Ms. A, February 7, 2017). Another informant emphasized, "Being in Thailand, we should know Thai" (interview with Mr. B, February 10, 2017). But Thai people are less successful in their competence using the Burmese language.

Some NGOs have tried to produce newspapers in Burmese and distribute them among migrant workers. The newspapers include local advertisements and the media space in their own language provides in-group freedom for conveying news and message.

As for online communication, these days, social media and other online channels are the easiest ways for them to connect and make contact among themselves and various organisations in their own languages. It is another way for migrant workers to share information as well as obtain updates on the current situation quickly and widely and serves as a tool of communication with family members back home in Myanmar.

Our team observed a few bilingual (Thai and Myanmar) signs in markets, department stores, and even on ATM machines in Samut Sakhon Province, which suggests that businesses recognize the importance of language in reaching out to customers.

Education domain

In the past, some illegal migrants to Thailand came alone while others brought their families. Most were young adults of working age. Later, many migrant workers married among themselves or with partners of different ethnic groups or nationalities, including Thais, and their children were often born in Thailand. In other cases, children followed their parents to work in Thailand, but since it is illegal in Thailand to hire workers under 18 years old, care for the children of migrant workers became the responsibility of the Thai government and private sector.

A Thai Cabinet Resolution in 2000 sought to control the number of migrant workers by forbidding family members to accompany the worker and ordering that any pregnant female migrant workers were to be sent back home immediately. This announcement was accused of alleged bias against the migrant workers (Photikanit, Sirasoonthorn, & Buddharaksa, 2017, p.112). Still, many migrant workers do have their children with them while working and living in Thailand. In the past, many cases of child abuse and child labour were exposed because there was no clear policy providing education for the children of migrant workers. Only a few NGOs and religious places offered shelter for them to study informally, and several local schools whose headmasters collaborated with the NGOs admitted migrant children to study as they understood that if these children were left at home without any chance for education, they might become victims of violence or behave improperly, harming themselves and society. However, initially, these schools received a

negative response from many Thai parents who did not want their children to study with migrant children. Nonetheless, some headmasters were determined to pursue their mission, despite their being no model for teaching migrant children together with Thai students in the same class, with different languages and cultures, different backgrounds, and different ages. These factors challenged teachers, who worked hard to find ways to teach and manage the new situation in which they found themselves. Interpreters played an important role during the adjustment period to make the learning process smoother. These schools tried to promote a multicultural atmosphere of learning and knowing each other, and they quickly became role models for the province to prove to international organisations that child labour was in fact declining, partly because the children were in school.

In 2005, the Ministry of Education ordered that schools should provide compulsory education to all children. The Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Education stated, "They are all children of the world and need to receive an education in accordance with the convention on children's rights that says all children in Thailand shall receive the same education rights as Thais." He also mentioned that there are no clear figures for migrant children, and that these were needed for their successful education (*The Nation*, 2018).

There are three types of organisation running education for migrant children, as indicated below.

NGOs

NGOs provide informal education to migrant children and migrant workers as follows:

For children's education

There are several sizes of migrant learning centres (MLCs) run by NGOs in Samut Sakhon. MLCs are non-formal education centres attended by around 50-60 students, starting from kindergarten. Some are run by foundations supported by donations from parents, the private sector, or nearby temples. The non-formal education curriculum is used in teaching, and Burmese teachers teach maths, Burmese, and English, along with Thai teachers. These students take their exams at non-formal education offices in both countries.

Life skills training for adults

The NGOs help migrant workers exercise their basic rights and learn what they should know when they work in Thailand. This is done through bilingual

brochures, booklets, and posters, as well as smartphone applications, Facebook, and LINE. They also provide English and computer courses to adult migrant workers to empower them. Those who can communicate in Thai and Burmese can join networks to update their knowledge of relevant laws and regulations in order to help others, including local authorities, if needed.

Religious places

The majority of migrant workers are Buddhists. There are many temples and a Catholic church that help migrant children and adults to improve their knowledge and better their lives, as follows:

Buddhist temples

There are a number of Buddhist temples in Samut Sakhon that were constructed by and to serve ethnic groups, such as Mon and Burmese. Moreover, abbots, monks, and liaisons are of the same ethnic group, factors which help migrant workers of similar ethnicity feel comfortable, like at home. Migrant workers have faith in Buddhism. They play primary roles in taking care of the temples and the monks and become attached to their temple. Furthermore, many Thais do not go to temples, so it is the strength of the migrants' faith that maintains Buddhism in this province. The temple functions as the centre of their life, facilitating and helping them to upgrade their quality of life and mitigating their struggles. They also serve as learning centres for the community.

In fact, when a couple of temples began welcoming migrants, many people were opposed, and only some were prepared to open for migrant workers to make merit and participate in activities. Later, local people realized that the migrants were in fact pious and well-versed in doctrine, and, before long, others started to welcome them (although most remain true to their old temples).

When migrant parents go to temples, their children accompany them and help clean up the temples after activities. Sometimes, when migrant teenagers are arrested because of the language barrier, the abbot has to intervene; relationships and trust between migrant workers and monks are usually very strong.

Temples are also education places for migrant workers and their children, as follows:

- (1) Temples are long life learning centres for Buddhists – a place to learn and practice the religious teachings of Lord Buddha, a place to contribute their skills for temple activities, a place to meet other members and newcomers, and a place to make merit, relax and feel safe.

(2) Temples and volunteers cooperate with home country authorities so as to be able to use the Myanmar curriculum to teach the children of migrant workers in Samut Sakhon in areas reserved for study in the temples. The subjects include Burmese, English, Thai, mathematics, and science, taught free of charge. Children bring their own food, and donations from parents and the private sector are used to support this education. Some places use primary grade materials from the Myanmar curriculum to teach the migrant children at five levels, one level per room (section). Teachers are from Myanmar and this approach to educating the children hopes to receive approval from international migrant educational organizations so that the results are acceptable to management.

(3) Temples cooperate with informal education centres at both the district and provincial levels to offer: (a) Thai language courses to migrants and their children; and (b) teach and study using non-formal education curricula in temples for migrant workers and children. Whoever passes Thai courses are able to communicate in Thai in all four skills, and the children can then continue with their education alongside Thai students in the formal schools.

(4) Temples use the schools located within their confines to accept migrant children to study in the schools at all levels.

Catholic Church

Another learning centre is run by the Catholic Church. Eight years ago, it started by teaching Thai language, culture, and etiquette to the children of migrants with refreshments. Later, in 2010, the centre was opened formally, and, today, there are three centres with over 380 students. Students have a chance to study using the Burmese curriculum with two Burmese volunteer teachers, two Thai teachers, and one Thai manager. They study Burmese, Mon, Thai, and English from native speakers in four classrooms (A, B, C, and D) for children aged 4-15 years. One room has two classes mixed together; teachers divide the children into two to three groups in one room. The teachers at the three centres set examination questions in Burmese, and students help each other to organise the place, and provide a food service and other things. They appear happy with the good care they receive at the centres. Migrant parents contribute five baht a day for their kids' food, but only half of the students can pay that regularly. There is also a school bus service.

These children have been taught and trained in a positive way. They respect Buddhism, have a social service mindset, and are humble and polite. They are taught the values of being good people by knowing and practicing Thai laws, singing Thai and Burmese national anthems, chanting in Thai and

Burmese, meditating, and having life skills. Occupational skills are offered to students and the Burmese teachers also visit the children's families as friends. There is a medical volunteer team from their hospital network that provides check-ups for students and parents on a regular basis, and the centres also organize activities for parents and students on their available days.

One centre with more than ten students teaches in English, along with the Thai and Burmese languages; the majority being Mon who study together with Burmese.

They wear Burmese uniforms with white and green like in Myanmar. The school teaches them to be "Mr/Ms Yes" - a person willing to help at school and in the community, anytime. These students can teach their parents the Thai language, and the centres motivate qualified migrant children to be change agents for their families, communities, and society.

For adult migrant workers

On Sundays, the learning centres teach Thai to new migrant workers for two hours and one hour of English, free of charge. One centre provides computer courses from Monday to Wednesday, three hours a day. Every Sunday, a half day of learning is offered.

Thai government schools

Many Thai government schools in Samut Sakhon affiliate with temples and are fostered by them. Some collaborate with the temples and private sector facilities nearby, such as Luang Paet Kosol Upatham School. New students are first enrolled in the preparation centre, the teacher's salary being paid by a big factory in the province. Some teacher-assistants from NGOs also help with the schools' programmes. When children are ready and wish to study, they are added to the system. The Thai government subsidizes students on a per head basis, both Thai and non-Thai. The numbers in each school vary in each semester as the children may have to follow their parents when they change work location. As a result, the varying numbers of students can affect the budget provided to the schools. Children of g-type migrant workers can study in Thailand free from three years old up to grade nine. After that, they have to pay.

The Thai teachers cannot speak Burmese, whereas the children of migrant workers can speak Thai within three to four months. English is taught by a Burmese teacher who graduated in Myanmar.

Some schools admit more migrant children than Thai children because they are located near factories. Many migrant children study well under the Thai

curriculum and sometimes pursue tertiary education, developing better leadership abilities than many Thai children.

Thai and migrant workers' children generally get along and exchange experiences and ideas through ASEAN-focused activities.

In terms of models of education for migrant children in Samut Sakhon, there are three types:

1) Thai curriculum focusing on Thainess or monoculture. Parents send their children to Thai schools as they have to work in Thailand for a long time and there is often no one in the home village to take care of their children if they send them back. Unfortunately, most teachers do not have much awareness of the cultural differences and ethnic peculiarities of the students and lack an understanding of migrant children, which can lead to bias. The educational rights of these children are thus ignored, especially the right to receive the necessary life skills and maintain their ethnic identities. Not being open-minded about the existence of multicultural differences leads to countless human rights abuses against migrant workers (Rathaborirak, 2011). Moreover, Arphattananon (2016, p. 190-191) states that she observed migrant students lowering their heads when the teacher was teaching the history of Thai and Burmese battles. This may create a contradiction between lesson content and the migrant students' identity. Some have adjusted so well despite their difficulty to be selected to compete in Thai etiquette contests. Regrettably assimilation success has also led to some losing proficiency in their mother tongue.

Thai students do not have a chance to learn much about the cultural identities of their migrant friends while many migrant children gradually lose their ethnic identity and become Thai. Those migrant children who study hard often go on to graduate from higher education, becoming part of the generation of new Thais who know and communicate well in Thai as well as their mother tongue.

There is, unfortunately, no current initiative for formal education promoting multiculturalism for Thai and migrant students.

2) Flexible curriculum blending aspects of Thainess with features of migrant cultures. A few schools and NGOs are knowledgeable about the different cultures of the students and have created cultural activities, such as a Burmese class for exchanges among students. Teachers also learn from their migrant students, and successful migrant students can pursue their studies in their home country.

3) The Burmese curriculum run by NGOs prepares children to continue their studies in Myanmar (Rathaborirak, 2011). Students wear uniforms like students in Myanmar, teachers are from Myanmar, and parents often want their children to continue their studies in Myanmar after studying Burmese at the primary level in Thailand. However, there is no transferable curriculum between Thailand and Myanmar for these children yet, meaning that if they return to Myanmar, they may be forced to restart their education from grade 1.

Nonetheless, no matter what curriculum is used, these migrant children are included as part of the mainstream society with the same equal opportunities as other Thai students. They are groomed in a Thai environment grounded in Thai language and culture. Meanwhile, at home, their native cultural and language identities are preserved and practiced in the family and community domain. The young generation will be able to integrate into Thai society and study to the highest degree they can afford. Being bilingual (Burmese/Mon-Thai), or trilingual with English, will be an asset for Myanmar as it opens to the world, as seen in the following example:

Pai is determined to take a long vacation back in Myanmar to find a job. Since receiving family news that his homeland has begun to develop, Thai businessmen have opened numerous hotels and desperately seek Thai speakers. Pai is planning to return with his wife and nine-month-old daughter. He will stay if the job is stable and the salary not too small, although it may not reach 10,000 baht (Wongsamut, 2017).

It can be said that all migrant workers in Thailand can speak some Thai, but not many Thais bother to learn Burmese. Interpreters are always in demand.

Health care domain

Although health checks are required before processing at the One Stop Service (OSS) in Thailand, migrant housing is not hygienic due to the crowded living conditions in small rooms. The custom of betel chewing is also a problem, though most have learned to maintain Thai levels of cleanliness at home and in public. Migrant workers, especially those aged between 15-44 years, get sick like everyone else with illnesses, such as headaches, fever, sore throat, and infectious diseases. In particular, reproductive health issues related to mother and child hygiene and contraception, including population control are ever present as migrants tend to have higher childbirth rates (Rathaborirak, 2011).

The Samut Sakhon government hospital plans to create a centre for migrant workers, which will provide statistics on migrant workers, the number

of social security recipients, and brochures related to health, rights, language, and culture in a range of languages. Currently, they are collecting data from stakeholders and offering consultations for migrant workers.

Hospital personnel take a proactive approach by visiting communities of migrant workers monthly, which allows them to know where the immigrants live, their living conditions, and learn about their culture. They train volunteers in the communities to identify symptoms. In the past, the language barrier was a problem, but interpreters were hired to help them to communicate with migrant workers about health care, and volunteers who are bilingual or multilingual depending on the area, accompany the health care officers as interpreters. Staff from the hospital take pictures of the migrant areas when they visit for a better understanding of their living conditions and health risks.

The hospital sends out groups to check on fishing boats when they return to port, and teams train the crews on how to do primary health care. Medicine bags are provided and can be filled at the hospital. The governor has approved the setting up of a Red Cross boat to visit the fishing boats weekly with a doctor, nurse, and pharmacist. They board every fishing boat to give health care advice and treatment and have serviced over 60 boats already.

They also visit 13 childcare centres with 1,100 children to vaccinate and educate the children on health care in the hope they will transfer knowledge to their parents, and, because some migrant workers still believe in shaman, these groups of children will serve as change agents to their parents' health behaviour.

In hospitals, there is a migrant worker committee consisting of participating parties that meet to solve problems together. Although some have learned a bit of Burmese, it does not help much. They train interpreters in how to translate conversations between migrant patients and health care personnel, and receive training on multicultural sensitivity for effective holistic well-being by the Research Institute for Languages and Culture of Asia (RILCA), Mahidol University research team.

Interpreters are selected from migrant workers who can communicate well in Thai. Interpreters are available at the hospital 24 hours per day, but, in terms of quality, they are not up to professional standards as they have not formally studied interpretation and health care. However, they are improving by doing and learning, and studying formally at the hospital on Thursdays to learn about various medicines.

The situation of unskilled migrant workers in Malaysia

Although Malaysia's fertility rate is relatively high, the country has experienced a labour workforce shortage similar to the situation in Thailand, i.e. people are not interested in 3D (dangerous, dirty and difficult) jobs. Since 1990, Malaysia has accepted low skilled migrant workers, and there are 3-4 million migrant workers currently employed in Malaysia who constitute approximately 20-30 per cent of the country's workforce. The migrant workers are working in the agricultural, manufacturing, and construction industries, which, collectively, contributed MYR297 billion (US\$68 billion) or 35.7 per cent of Malaysia's gross domestic product in 2014 (International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 2).

The labour policies of Malaysia are changed frequently, and the policies accommodate employers who need migrant workers immediately rather than allowing for longer term settlement. The Eleventh Malaysia Plan (2016-2020) maintains limits on the employment of low-skilled migrant workers of 15 per cent of the total workforce by 2020 (International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 2).

The image and perception of migrant workers among Malaysian society through political and public discourse have created a negative attitude towards migrant workers as a potential threat to national security and harmful to the country's long-term social and economic development, as reported by the ILO:

Recent years have seen the rise of increasingly virulent rhetoric against migrants within the popular media, blaming them for a host of social problems ranging from electoral fraud to increases in street crime. Scapegoating of migrants, regardless of the realities, has contributed to an environment where exploitation and abuse are sometimes viewed as acceptable (International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 3).

In the past, the voices of the international community and consumer groups related to migrant workers' mistreatment in Malaysia created a shift in labour migration and anti-trafficking policies. In the Eleventh Malaysia Plan, several new measures were announced to deal with labour protection including raising labour standards in line with the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work (International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 4).

The Malaysian government has tried to initiate mechanisms to improve the effective and legal processing of migrant worker recruitment, such as legislation in the form of the Private Employment Agency Act 1981, which states that recruitment agencies should obtain a licence to operate from the Ministry of

Human Resources (MOHR); the Anti-Trafficking in Persons Act 2007 that was amended to become the Anti-Trafficking in Persons and the Anti-Smuggling of Migrants Act in 2010 (ATIPSOM), which broadened the definition of trafficking to include all actions involved in acquiring or maintaining the labour or services of a person through coercion. An anti-trafficking unit under the Royal Malaysian Police was also formed, and although the government has tried to fight trafficking, it has not yet produced concrete results. A small increase in the number of trafficking victims identified has occurred in recent years, but the quantity of convictions has declined precipitously (International Labour Organization, 2016, p.6-7).

According to a recent report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Trafficking in Persons, weaknesses in the Malaysian approach include the limited effectiveness of law enforcement against trafficking, including insufficient coordination and capacity and corruption of officials (Giammarinaro, 2015, cited in International Labour Organization, 2016, p.7). Another issue is that the victims of trafficking and forced labour may not be able to contest their cases within the three months they are permitted to stay in Malaysia; therefore, they prefer to negotiate a financial settlement (International Labour Organization, 2016, p.8).

There are two types of migrant workers in Malaysia: a) contract workers (low-skilled workers); and b) expatriates (high-skilled workers), who earn over MYR3,000 (US\$685) per month, with the latter receiving preferential treatment in terms of admission, duration of stay, and accompanying dependents (Kaur, 2008, cited in International Labour Organization, 2016, p.9).

However, there are no comprehensive assessments of labour market demand in the sectors involved, only a “guesstimate” of the need for migrant worker (Abella & Martin, 2015, cited in International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 10). Therefore, in 2012, the Institute of Labour Market Information and Analysis (ILMIA) was established to support an evidence-based policy, with the objective being to carry out labour market studies and projections, including estimating the supply and demand of labour by occupation and sector from 2015-2030 (International Labour Organization, 2016, p.10).

Malaysia has negotiated bilateral memorandums of understanding (MOUs) to manage labour migration dating as far back as 1984. More recently, MOUs have been signed with Sri Lanka, China, Thailand, Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, Vietnam, and Indonesia. MOUs with some specific countries are negotiated by the sending countries in order to guarantee domestic workers fair payment, rights, and protection. However, they can have the unintended effect of institutionalizing discriminatory practices towards certain nationalities of

domestic workers, rather than enabling the more egalitarian improvements that could be achieved through national legislation (International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 14). The MOU with Bangladesh, established a government to government recruitment process that removes the involvement of private recruitment agencies. From the study in 2013, migrant workers paid BDT33,178 (US\$430) to migrate to Malaysia, which represents a major reduction from the BDT250,000-300,000 (US\$3,205-3,850) in recruitment fees (8-10 times) that were previously being charged by private recruitment agencies and brokers (International Labour Organization, 2014; Palma, 2015; Wickramasekara, 2014, cited in International Labour Organization, 2016, p. 16).

In 2016, the Government announced that the minimum wage for workers in the private sector would be MYR1,000 per month (US\$230) in the Peninsula and MYR920 (US\$210) in Sabah, Sarawak, and Labuan (Bernama, 2015). Migrant workers have to pay an annual levy depending on the sector.

Migrant workers in Malaysia in 2017 were from the following countries: Indonesia 828,283; Myanmar 143,056; Vietnam 51,169; Philippines 64,043; Thailand 12,442; Cambodia 8,548; Lao PDR 61 (International Labour Organization, 2017). Bangladesh 221,089; India 114,455; Pakistan 59,281; and China 15,399 (Nasa, 2017).

Tom Yam Kung in Malaysia

In the case of Thai migrant workers in Malaysia, the two businesses they mostly work in are Tom Yam Kung restaurants and Thai Spas. Malaysian people prefer to eat out and like Tom Yam Kung but do not cook Thai food. Thai food must be made by Thai chefs, so there is an opportunity for people in the three southernmost provinces of Thailand to simply cross the border and go and work in Malaysia, given that there are few job opportunities in Thailand's restive South. They generally work and stay with other migrants, and, as newcomers, are unable to communicate in Malay or even English. The work permit for a Thai Tom Yam Kung worker is for six months, pre-paid by the business owner and deducted from the salary of the worker. The process for obtaining the visa and work permit is done by hiring agencies.

Thai workers from the three southernmost provinces have a common language, religion, and culture with Malaysians, but it may take around three months for them to adjust their Malay dialect to standard Malay, something they do easily and quickly. They feel at home working in Malaysia. A joint committee at the local level between Malaysia and the three southernmost provinces of Thailand which, was once effective in the past, is now much less so.

“Thai” is used in the names of many restaurants in Kuala Lumpur, such as “Thai Restaurant”; “Tom Yam Kung”; “Jan Jan Thai Restaurant”; “Songkhla Thai Restaurant”; “Bua Thai: Thai Cuisine Bistro”; “BBQ Thai”; “Sanook Thai Food”, etc. This shows that Thai food is popular, especially Tom Yam Kung, and, as noted by a Thai captain in one restaurant, “People here like to eat shrimp.”

Thai Spas in Malaysia

Thai Spa shops in Malaysia are located near each other. Most Thai migrant workers are from north-eastern or northern Thailand, and many are illegal. They stay together in accommodation provided by the Malay owners, cannot communicate in Malay or English apart from a few words related to massage, and come for the better pay which they send back home.

There are other spa and massage shops branded as “Thai” such as “Thai Spa”, “Thai Massage”, “Sabai Sabai Thai Spa”, “House of Thai Massage”, and “Thai Odyssey”, but some employ numerous nationalities, both men and women, working under the “Thai” brand name. Some are quite professional based on their own experience, and some are not, which leads to unfortunate customers experiencing pain after their massage.

Thai migrant workers in Malaysia have good working skills but they are weak in language, social skills and cultural matters. Illegal workers exacerbate this feature and fail to adequately prepare themselves before leaving - naively they take the risk believing that the Thai government will not abandon them. If arrested they are quickly released or deported just to return at a later date.

The Royal Thai Embassy in cooperation with the Thai community in Malaysia have formed a “Thai Labour Volunteer” group to assist the embassy’s work. Another group is the “Thai Volunteers in Malaysia” led by a Thai lady married to a Malaysian. Most members are women married with Malaysians and living in Kuala Lumpur. They help and empower each other, visit Thai prisoners, help the Thai embassy on the important holidays and events, and teach the Thai language and culture to Malaysians.

Bangladeshi migrant workers work in construction, factories, and services. As they have the same religion as Malaysians, it is easier for them to live and work legally. Some business owners reflect that Bangladeshi workers work hard, are humble, and learn Malay quickly by themselves or with help from their Malaysian bosses.

Indonesian migrant workers mostly work in housekeeping and construction. They share a common language, culture, and religion with Malaysians. Most Indonesian women are hired in domestic work.

Vietnamese migrant workers mainly work in three sectors: manufacturing, construction, and plantations. Some work in the service sector, such as Vietnamese restaurants. They live and work together and practice English through social media and with customers.

Burmese migrant workers work in manufacturing. There are around 100,000 Rohingya who have fled Myanmar and are being helped by the Malaysian government. Some work illegally to survive and try for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) status by sending request letters and emails every day hoping to be accepted by a third country in the future. Some prefer to stay in Malaysia as they can adjust and be happy with their life condition. Most learn Malay by themselves, from local friends and bosses, and many learn to speak Malay fluently.

The language policy in Malaysia has been reversed. In Dr. Mahathir Mohamad's first era, maths and science were taught in English, but children in rural areas had problems. When Mr. Najib Razak was Prime Minister, the policy changed back to using Bahasa Malaysia. Parents protested, but only 200 schools mostly private, could continue teaching certain subjects in English. Approximately 95% of Chinese send their children to private and English schools; 50% of Indians send their children to Tamil schools at which students can select Tamil or English as the medium of instruction at the primary level. From secondary onwards, they learn in Malay, but maths and science are taught in English. At present, many parents prefer to send their children to schools teaching in Chinese (at primary level) to benefit future business interests, but the government does not recognize Chinese schools forcing many to go to study in Taiwan and stay and work there. The government should recognize such schools to avoid a brain drain. Professor Dr. Maya David, a Malaysian professor, asks "Can a national language really unite people or not?" The answer is: it both "unites and disunites" people. The mother tongue is spoken by the parents, so children should start with their mother tongue. If parents do not speak their mother tongue, it will be lost. However, in Sabah and Sarawak, the three languages used by the main ethnic groups - Bidayuh, Kadazandusun and Iban - are subjects taught in schools there (interview with Maya David, October 26, 2018).

The language used by migrant workers in almost all domains is either Malay and/or English. There is no free education or health care. In Malaysia, unskilled women migrant workers will be sent back if they get pregnant.

Malaysia has strict laws and applies them accordingly, although some problems to do with agencies persist, and some officers are corrupt.

As for locals, most do not feel that migrant workers take their jobs as Malaysians do not like to do 3D jobs. Some are scared to visit areas where migrants congregate. Malaysians of Indian descent say they feel unequal to Bumiputras and inferior as the fourth rank in the society: The 1st rank are Malays; 2nd rank Chinese; 3rd rank Bangladeshis (married to Bhumiputra Malaysian women). Many Indians who work on plantations do not study and cannot speak Malay, and when rural land is sold to real estate interests, they are forced to move to the city, which is unfamiliar and offers little legal work for them. They do not refuse 3D jobs, but they need fair payment for living in the city. With low wages like migrant workers, they cannot survive. One local suggested a slogan change from "The son of the soil" to "We are Malaysians" for inclusiveness and equality.

NGOs in Malaysia have a responsibility to safeguard migrant workers, prevent their exploitation and cooperate with International Labour Organization (ILO) initiatives. Language is the main impediment to communication with migrant workers. Outreach programmes actively seek out members and maintain contact with embassies in an effort to broaden their reach into the public domain with flyers and Internet applications in the migrants' own languages.

Situation of the foreign workers in Singapore

All foreigners who intend to work in Singapore must have a valid pass (commonly known as a work visa) before they begin work. In Singapore, only skilled and semi-skilled foreign workers are specified as required labour. Semi-skilled foreign workers in the construction, manufacturing, marine shipyard, process or services sectors have to obtain a work permit (Ministry of Manpower, 2018b). English and/or Chinese are the official and working language(s).

Singapore has a policy aimed at reducing the number of foreign workers but increasing their quality. The government encourages employers to limit their dependence on foreign labour by setting a maximum rate of one third of the total employees in an enterprise. As locals usually have higher levels of education and greater income, foreigners coming to work in Singapore can also obtain a better qualification through a special foundation for the economic development of Singapore (Office of Labour Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy, Singapore, n.d.). The foreign worker quotas for various sectors are as follows:

1. Construction: One full time local worker (local) can notify seven foreign workers.
2. Petrochemical industry (Process): One full time local person working can notify seven foreign workers.
3. Manufacturing: An employer can employ foreign workers who account for not more than 60% of all workers.
4. Service sector: An employer can employ foreign workers who account for not more than 40% of the total number of workers.
5. Marine/Shipbuilding Industry: Currently, an employer who employs one full-time local worker can employ 3.5 foreign workers (Ministry of Manpower, 2018a).

Foreign nationals permitted work permits:

1. Traditional Sources (TS): Malaysia, Republic of China, Indonesia.
2. Non-Traditional Sources (NTS): Thailand, India, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Burma, the Philippines, and Pakistan.
3. North Asian Sources (NAS): Hong Kong, Macau, South Korea, and Taiwan.

According to the Ministry of Manpower of Singapore, in 2018 there were 975,800 unskilled and semi-skilled foreign workers in the country (Singaporean Ministry of Manpower cited in Han, 2018). Thai workers worked in construction, shipyards, and domestic work (Srisuriya, 2016).

From September 2015, work permit holders who bring their spouse and children to Singapore under the Dependent Pass must earn a monthly income of at least SGD 5,000. Parents under the Long-Term Visit Pass must earn at least SGD 10,000 per month (Office of Labour Affairs, Royal Thai Embassy, Singapore, n.d.). The work permit is valid up to two years, depending on the validity of the worker's passport, security bond, and employment period (Ministry of Manpower, 2018a).

The Ministry of Manpower provides a mandatory Settling-In Programme (SIP), for new foreign workers, which is similar to that for first-time domestic workers. It helps them learn about Singapore's social norms and laws, as well as their employment rights and obligations (Yi, 2017). Employers of maids have to pay for their one-day course on language and work improvement, basic rights, and some important telephone numbers in their native language.

As for other semi-skilled workers, employers are encouraged to empower their workers by sending them to be trained for work improvement. Employers pay 80% and employees pay 20% of the training fees.

Two main issues are still problematic for foreign workers in Singapore – employers do not pay the workers' salaries or compensate them for work injuries (Yi, 2017).

The language policy of Singapore emphasizes bilingualism: English-Chinese (Mandarin)/Malay/Tamil. In public schools, students have to select another mother tongue language, which should be learned outside for free, and then bring their certificate to be certified by their schools. Other ethnic languages can be taught informally in various ways such as the followings:

- Thai volunteers, including monks: Teaching Thai language and culture in a Thai temple for foreigners; Pali for Buddhist chanting.
- Thai Informal Education: curriculum taught by Thai volunteer teachers in a church. It offers all subjects to Thai students who want to learn their mother tongue language, and Thai workers in Singapore who want to upgrade their knowledge. Thai students can show the certificates earned here to be approved by schools.

Other languages, such as Hindi, are accepted as foreign languages, and are taught in public schools and private classes in the Little India area.

Foreign workers in Singapore have to pass English and skill tests before they start working. Although they may pass the test, in fact, many unskilled workers have to continue to practice their English through working. Some have learned by themselves, and there are private English learning centres for helping foreign migrant workers.

Although Singapore needs more skilled and white-collar workers, semi-skilled and unskilled workers for the five types of labour mentioned are also still needed as locals generally do not like these jobs. The government tries to find a balance between the local workforce and the number of foreign workers in the country. Although they need qualified workers, negative attitudes by some locals towards foreign workers are often expressed publicly.

Discussion

This part compares the migrant issues in Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore and the language domains used by the mainstream societies and migrant or foreign workers in these three countries.

Table 1: Issues related to receiving countries' policies, locals' adjustment, and migrant/foreign workers

Issues	Thailand	Malaysia	Singapore
1. Low birth-rate but high rate of aging people	✓	✓	✓
2. Locals refuse to take 3D jobs.	✓	✓	✓
3. Migrant or foreign workers require a work permit to work.	✓	✓	✓
4. Employees pay levies.	✓	✓	✓
5. Working visa with work permit is valid for two years.	✓	✓	✓
6. Orientation of receiving country for migrant/ foreign workers.	N/A	N/A	✓
7. Female migrant workers give birth in the receiving country.	✓	N/A	N/A
8. Government takes care of education for migrant workers' children.	✓	N/A	N/A
9. Government/ NGOs provide language and occupational training courses.	✓	N/A	✓
10. Government takes special care of health and well-being of migrant workers.	✓	N/A	N/A
11. Interpreters play important role in inter-communication between migrant workers and local authorities in the receiving country.	✓	N/A	N/A
12. Language/religious and cultural similarities attract similar in-group migrant workers from Asian countries to the receiving country.	✓	✓	✓
13. Migrant/foreign workers are discriminated against in the receiving country.	✓	✓	✓
14. Migrant/ foreign workers are taken advantage of by some groups of corrupt people in the receiving country.	✓	✓	✓

According to the above summary, there are several shared issues between these three countries, such as numbers 2, 3, 6, 14, and 15. Regarding number 2, most local people in the three countries refuse to do 3D jobs, which are one of the reasons labour shortages persist.

Numbers 3 and 6: Malaysia and Thailand are trying to manage migrant workers through legal mechanisms, such as work permits, whereas Singapore has already gone beyond that. Due to the different levels of economic development between these three countries, their needs vary. Thailand still requires unskilled migrant workers for cost reduction reasons and certain manual labour that cannot be done by machine. Thailand is learning from its experience and is trying to manage unskilled migrant workers more systematically through a work permit system, which demands the cooperation of

the sending countries. Malaysia's level of development is somewhere between that of Thailand and Singapore, and it is also working hard on managing migrant workers through legal means.

Numbers 14 and 15: Discrimination by locals is common in all three receiving countries. As the migrant/foreign workers are poor and under privileged, their lives and experiences are remote from those of their hosts. Formal and informal discourse about some migrant workers' negative behaviours is communicated through all channels, creating myths about migrants in these three societies.

Numbers 4 and 5: Regardless of whether the employer or employee pays the worker's income tax, the host countries can collect revenues from Value Added Tax (VAT).

Numbers 8-11: Thailand cannot implement regulations prohibiting women migrant workers from getting pregnant. Moreover, in the past, illegal workers arrived together with their families or children. If migrant children in Thai society are not taken care of, they may cause social problems or worse. They might be forced into child labour, which is banned, so empowerment schemes are provided to the children of migrant workers through education, health care, and supervised work. It seems that Thailand cares for the well-being of its migrant workers more than the other two countries. The living conditions of migrant workers in Thailand is better than back home.

Number 12: Interpreters are more necessary in Thailand than in the other two countries as most Thai people are not interested in improving their foreign language skills, and, especially not the languages of migrant workers; as noted in previous studies. However, there is no systematic approach to producing qualified interpreters, so, migrant workers who can speak Thai fluently fill-in as interpreters in many government offices and for the private sector and NGOs. In 2016, the Thai government approved 'language coordinator' as one of the three jobs that migrant workers from Myanmar, Lao, and Cambodia could do. However, they could only perform according to their capacity for which there was no assurance of quality and reliability. Hence, interpreters of specific ASEAN languages: Burmese, Vietnamese, and Cambodian should be considered and planned for as part of long-term initiatives, which will serve the national language policy of Thailand. Furthermore, Thai government officers or private sector staff who are able to communicate in these languages effectively should receive significant 'language competence compensation' as a paid benefit. Perhaps this is one way to encourage more Thais to learn other languages.

Number 13: Common language/religion/culture attracts migrant/foreign workers to work in the receiving countries. This is more or less true in the three countries. Thailand welcomes people from neighbouring countries, such as Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam because they share a similar religion and culture. By contrast, Malaysia welcomes people from Muslim countries, including Rohingyas. In Singapore, South Asian foreign workers are preferred by Indian Singaporeans; Muslim workers are preferred by Malay employers.

Moreover, Tom Yam Kung restaurants and migrants from southernmost Thailand should be promoted and upgraded as “food ambassadors” representing both Thailand and Malaysia. As Tom Yam Kung is one of the cultural diplomacies under Soft Power, Thailand should promote it as a formal ambassador to Malaysia.

According to Stewart (1968), there are ten functional domains in language planning for each country, which can be summarized as follows:

In Singapore, mainstream and foreign workers’ languages function as follows:

- English, Mandarin, Malay, and Tamil function as official, wider communication, international capital, educational, school subject, literacy, and religious languages.
- Hindi functions as wider communication, group, educational, subject, literacy, and religious language.
- Bengali functions as wider communication, group, educational, school subject, literacy language.
- Punjabi functions as wider communication, group, educational, school subject, literacy, and religious language.
- Thai language: Group, educational, school subject, and religious language.
- Chinese dialects function as wider communication, group, and school subject.
- Burmese language: Group and religious language.

In Malaysia, mainstream and migrant workers’ languages function as follows:

- English and Bahasa Malaysia function as official, wider communication, international capital, educational, school subject, literacy, and religious languages.
- Chinese functions as official, wider communication, international capital, educational, school subject, and literacy languages.

- Tamil functions as official, wider communication, group, educational, school subject, literacy, and religious language.
- Burmese functions as group and religious language.
- Bengali functions as group language.
- Thai functions as group, subject and religious language.

In Thailand, mainstream and migrant workers' languages function as follows:

- Thai functions as official, capital, educational, subject, literacy, and religious language.
- English functions as international, group, educational, subject, literacy, and religious language.
- Chinese functions international, group, educational, subject, and literacy language.
- Burmese functions as group, educational, subject, literacy, and religious language.

Conclusion

Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore cannot deny the fact that they need to employ migrant workers from neighbouring countries. Still, processes related to migrant employment should be more transparent, easier to understand, and strictly implemented. There should be a shift from paper documents to online materials. Orientation sessions on language, culture, and migrant rights - including phone numbers to call when help is needed - should be more widespread. Sending countries should educate migrant workers on the "Dos and Don'ts" of the receiving countries.

Moreover, cultural zones like certain temples in Samut Sakhon or department stores from the migrant's own countries in Singapore can be attractive and developed as tourist places and learning centres. Such places give foreign workers their own cultural and social space where they can mingle and conduct social activities freely - places of safety and comfort after a hard week of work in a foreign land. Such conveniences, coupled with transparent policies and clearer cross-linguistic communication, will bring balance to their lives and empower them to live well in the foreign land.

In terms of language diversity, all three countries are multilingual. Thailand should implement a bi/multilingual policy in order to prepare its human resources for internationalization using a 'carrot and stick' approach to

appeal to the governmental and non-governmental organizations concerned. Furthermore, ASEAN should consider the proper language policies it should collectively implement to create a more inclusive and harmonious community.

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