



Mahidol University
Wisdom of the Land

Managing Unskilled Migrant Workers' Language Diversity: The Multicultural Societies of Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore

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Rationale

- Thai, Malaysian and Singaporean people reject to do 3 Ds (Dirty, Dangerous and Demeaning jobs), they still need migrant workers.
- Pull factors of the destination countries: higher income, stable politics, easy life (like Thailand), aging society then need workers.
- Push factors of the origin countries: unstable politics, lower income, poverty.





Rationale (cont.)

- Globalization influences mobility around the world incl. ASEAN Community.
- Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore play the roles as the sending and receiving workers.
- Moreover, ASEAN is multicultural and multilingual society by its nature including the mobility of migrant workers in the region.
- Therefore, ASEAN Community reflects more its multicultural and multilingual region.





Rationale (cont.)

- In terms of language policy in ASEA, the ASEAN Charter indentify broadly as follows:

Article 34: : the working language of ASEAN shall be English.

- As Malaysia and Singapore have multilingual policy since post-colonization, Thailand has the National Language Policy around 10 years but it has not been implemented yet.
- This project would like to compare between these three countries on managing language diversity.





Objectives

- 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





Brief findings

- **Thailand**

- 1) No prior short training on basic rights and Thai language and culture for unskilled migrant workers from neighboring countries: Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos before working in TL.
- 2) Unskilled migrant workers' families follow the workers to Thailand.
- 3) Most Thai people dealing with unskilled migrant workers do not interest in their languages learning> Migrant workers have to be able to speak Thai





Brief findings

- **Thailand**

4) As TL has long experiences more than 20 years with unskilled migrant workers, we are adjusting and trying to register these workers.

5) Meanwhile, during the transitional period, we have to take care of the unskilled migrant workers' basic rights by providing the following facilities:





Brief findings

- **Thailand**

a) To empower the unskilled migrant workers by providing them the Non-formal Education scheme and some occupational trainings.

b) To provide alternative-education schemes to the children of the unskilled migrant workers:
Learning centers of the NGOs/ Burmese curriculum in some Buddhist monasteries/
Catholic church/ Thai government schools.





Brief findings

- **Thailand**

c) To provide bilingual official documents, signboards, posters, social media, news to the unskilled migrant workers' language: Burmese-Thai.

d) To provide interpreters in the government offices, hospitals by using the migrant workers who can communicate Thai-Burmese languages efficiently. (No Thai interpreter).





Policy recommendations

- To Thailand
 - 1) To encourage the Thai universities offer more courses on Southeast Asian languages interpretation and translation for producing Thai interpreters and translators, esp. Burmese, Cambodian, Vietnamese and Malaysian languages





Policy recommendations (cont.)

2) 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.

1) and 2) serve the Thai National Language Policy.





Policy recommendations (cont.)

- 3) To empower the migrant interpreters to be qualified interpreters.
- 4) To promote many multicultural and multilingual areas in Thailand to be Learning Centers for learning and sharing among people.
- 5) To 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.





Policy recommendations (cont.)

For ASEAN

In terms of language diversity, all three countries are multilingual.

1) ASEAN should consider the proper language policies > Multilingual policy

- It should collectively implement to create a more inclusive and harmonious community.

2) Myanmar and Thailand should consider how to transfer the Burmese students learning in Thailand to pursue their education in Myanmar.





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