

RE-EVALUATION OF FOREIGN WORKERS' PLACEMENT AND REPATRIATION FACTORS

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ABSTRACT – Malaysia has witnessed an influx of foreign workers (FWs), mainly due to its rapidly expanding economy. However, Malaysian labour migration policies have remained a short-term solution to fill instant labour shortages since they were introduced. The current policy has weaknesses due to not successfully controlling FWs at all phases, including the placement and repatriation stages. The focus of policies on public safety-rather than on labour administration and long-term sustainable development-has left room for abuse of and restrictions on FWs by employers and agents. This study aimed to identify crucial factors related to FWs' placement and repatriation phases, and focused on SDG 08 due to the connection between detected factors and sustainability via decent work. It adopted a sequential exploratory mixed methods design, characterised by qualitative (in-depth interviews) and quantitative (face-to-face survey) data collection and analysis, respectively. The results highlighted the need to re-evaluate certain placement and repatriation factors for faultless placement and impeccable return of FWs. The findings of this study will help in redesigning FWs' placement and repatriation policies. Moreover, the results will also assist in reducing illegal/irregular FWs as well as mistreating of FWs inside Malaysia, and ensuring FWs' contribution to Malaysian society and the economy.

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INTRODUCTION

Human migration, an age-old phenomenon, affects nearly every society across the world. Almost 3.6% of the world's population were international migrants globally in 2020, equating to around 281 million, and 169 million were migrant workers [1]. Recently, international labour migration has been considered a major global issue affecting most nations globally as a powerful force for social and economic development [2]. "World Migration Report 2022" mentions that Malaysia ranks 17 among the top 20 destination countries for international migrants in 2020 [1]. Malaysia has approximately 3.4 million migrant labourers, 10.7% of the total population in mid-2019 [3]. Malaysia, located in East Asia and the Pacific, has a high ratio of migrant workers compared to the total population. However, it has focused mainly on low-skilled foreign workers, who constitute approximately 20–30% of the country's workforce [4]. Even low-skilled migrant workers escalated to over 93% of foreigners in Malaysia [5].

Malaysian labour migration policies have remained an "interim solution" or "ad hoc approach", to fill immediate labour shortages since they were introduced [6], [7], [8]. The current policy has inbuilt weaknesses owing to not successfully controlling foreign workers at all phases, including recruitment (first phase), placement (second phase), employment (third phase) and repatriation (last phase). Furthermore, the present systems were formulated based on public safety and security rather than labour administration and long-term sustainable development [4]. FWs' rights and provisions under specific laws have been found to be discriminatory and arbitrary. Consequently, foreign workers suffer abuses and restrictions from their employers/ recruitment agents (Devadason and Meng, 2014), and the number of illegal/irregular workers increases highly rather than legal ones [5]. Malaysia has a vision of reaching a high-income nation status (WorldBank, 2015a). For that cause, Malaysia needs a high ratio of skilled workers. Malaysia will become a high-income country if its economy is globally competitive and resource-sustainable for future generations [9].

MEF (Malaysian Employers Federation) 'Survey on Management of Foreign Workers, which is an essential guide to the best practices adopted by the companies, found out that there were loopholes and opportunities to improve immensely foreign workers' management systems in recruitment, placement, employment and final repatriation phases [10]. Finding the appropriate formula for managing foreign labour, as well as maximising their benefits, is one of the prime challenges for Malaysia. Bank Negara (National Bank) Malaysia advises some approaches to manage foreign workers in Malaysia, such as migrant labour's role in the Malaysian economy should be clear, existing labour management tools might be more market-driven, ensuring FWs' (foreign workers) rights and agreed payment, effective monitoring should be confirmed [11]. The World Bank also emphasised reforming the Malaysian labour migration systems, and especially management policies should be focused on new HRD [12].

In September 2015, the UN General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for transforming the world [13]. In the SDGs, migration was considered essential to sustainable development for the first time in the mainstream global development landscape [14]. Therefore, a redesign of deployment and repatriation factors for migrant

workers is urgently required, as these are essential stages in foreign workers' (FWs) management. Lack of strenuous efforts for proper policies, these two levels remain unattended. Sustainability lies in a good starting as well as good accomplishment. Unscrupulous individuals should not be able to exploit foreign workers for their financial gain. There needs to be a win-win policy that provides benefits to both parties. The placement and repatriation of foreign workers must evolve over time so that no loopholes are left unattended. The following are the main research questions to be answered in this area: (1) what measures would ensure the smooth placement of selected migrant workers to the destination country (Malaysia) in the deployment phase?, (2) what measures would envisage the smooth return of migrant workers to their home country from Malaysia in the repatriation phase?

This study also focused on SDG 8 because of the association between FWs' placement/repatriation factors and sustainability through decent work and economic growth. The full title of SDG 8 is to: "Foster sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all" [15]. Following its target 8.8, protecting labour rights and promoting safe working environments are pre-conditions for sustainability [16]. As per the researcher's knowledge, considering sustainability, migrant workers' placement and repatriation issues have not yet been studied adequately in Malaysia. The traditional FWs' management process produces huge illegal and irregular foreign workers. Foreign workers' rights also are not addressed suitably. Subsequently, we have focused on some crucial issues around foreign workers' deployment and repatriation levels.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

This study adopted a sequential exploratory mixed methods design [17] to identify some crucial factors for enhancing the sustainability of FWs in Malaysia. Exploratory research is conducted to provide a clear definition of an inadequately studied problem. Figure 1 depicts the sequential exploratory strategy.

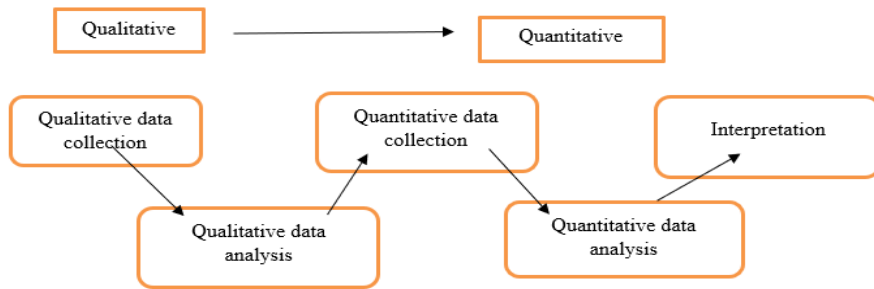


Figure 1. Sequential exploratory mixed-methods.

Qualitative method

Qualitative data were collected through in-depth interviews with the experts involved in Malaysia's foreign workers' management system. Regarding the selection method, purposive sampling was conducted to select the sample based on the study's purpose [18]. Table 1 lists the experts involved in this study.

Table 1. Experts as Respondents.

In-depth Interview (Expert Interview)	Remarks
Representative of Malaysian Employers Federation in Kuantan	Informant I
One Manager (Plantation Sector) in Kuantan	Informant II
One Agent of Migrant Workers in Kuantan	Informant III
One Factory Manager (Manufacturing) in Kuala Lumpur (KL)	Informant IV
One Factory Manager (Construction) in KL	Informant V
Labour Councillor of Source Country A in KL	Informant VI
Labour Councillor of Source Country B in KL	Informant VII
One Journalist of Labour Migrant Issues in KL	Informant VIII
One Senior Leader of Working Migrant Labours in KL	Informant IX

A semi-structured questionnaire (Appendix A) was used to interview the experts (the first phase) between February 2021 and April 2021. Detailed interview protocols were followed, and informed consent was obtained from all the respondents before taking the interview. After collecting data, we separately coded each transcript on the basis of the themes for the qualitative analysis. To this end, we used the thematic analysis method and the qualitative data analysis software NVivo (Version 1.6). NVivo helped us to organise the unstructured data through coding procedures, e.g. open coding, axial coding (categories), and selective coding (themes).

Quantitative method

For collecting quantitative data, we used in-person and face-to-face survey questionnaire methods. This approach helped us assemble actual information from the respondents. We used a random sampling design for the survey interview because it ensures an equal selection chance for everyone or everything within a defined region [19]. Moreover, a pilot study was conducted before the final survey to identify the loopholes in the survey questionnaire and environment setup. Ten participants were surveyed based on the findings; necessary modifications were made in reshaping the survey questionnaire. After that, it went through a validation process from three experts in this field. Subsequently, we conducted the survey in different places in Kuantan and Kuala Lumpur. The researchers collected data from Kuantan because it is an important industrial hub. Kuala Lumpur was chosen because it is the capital city and hence the most important place in Malaysia. This place also provided access to all the detailed research information. We interviewed 300 legal labour migrants in these cities. Table 2 shows the demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

Table 2. Respondents' profile.

Variables	N	%
Gender		
Male	274	91.3
Female	26	8.7
Education Level		
Did not attend school	77	25.7
Primary	127	42.3
Secondary	69	23.0
Higher secondary and above	27	9.0

Most of the respondents were male FWs who lived and worked in Malaysia. However, most FWs are low-skilled and have less education; in this research, almost 70% of the participants had primary level education or no school background, whereas the proportion of high education level respondents (secondary and higher secondary or above) was 30%. However, for further analysis, we treated the groups that did not attend school and had only primary education as "respondents with a low educational level." Likewise, respondents with secondary and higher secondary or above level education were recognised as "respondents with a high educational level." Respondents with a high-level educational background were also treated as a reference group.

The closed-ended survey questionnaire (Appendix B) comprised 17 items tapping into various dimensions of FWs' employment in Malaysia. The researcher conducted the survey interview between May 2021 and August 2021. The results were presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 to 5 (strongly disagree-1, disagree-2, neutral-3, agree-4 and strongly agree-5). We tested the instruments for validity and reliability and the survey data for normality. All data were found to be approximately normally distributed; consequently, we proceeded to the parametric test (one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) test). We used the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS 25) to analyse the survey data. We also performed the chi-square goodness of fit test to determine whether the proportion of respondents working as FWs was equal [20] between the four interviewee groups—those who did not attend school and those who received primary, secondary, higher secondary, or above education. The results showed that the proportions differed by the type of education level of the respondents, $X^2(3, N = 300) = 67.307, p = 0.000$.

FINDINGS

Qualitative findings (Placement phase)

Arrival procedures

- a) To receive within 24 hours of arrival: FWs should receive at the port of disembarkation within 24 hours of arrival. All respondents from I to IX (N=9) supported the proposal highly; for instance-"When unknown foreign workers reach at the port of disembarkation, agent and employers should receive them as early as possible not exceeding 24 hours of arrival."- one journalist of labour migration issues (respondent VIII). The rest of them opined the same. Informant I (representative of the Malaysian Employers Federation) added that we usually did it though sometimes it took a long time due to lack of proper documentation.
- b) To assist in immigration and customs: Respondent IX (one senior leader of migrant labour) emphasised the issue in the following way- "Newly arrived workers are not familiar with the system of immigration and customs procedures. Moreover, most of them are usually low-skilled and uneducated. For that cause, agents or employers should assist them in all administrative processes including immigration and custom". The remaining respondents also supported the issue strongly. At the same time, some respondents (N=5) mentioned that many FWs faced inhuman behaviour at immigration without any legal causes. These informants were III (one agent of migrant labour), VI (labour councillor of source country A), VII (labour councillor of source country B), VIII (one journalist of labour migrant issues) and IX (one senior leader of migrant labours).

- c) Providing uniform: "N=5" group respondents raised the issue and suggested it enthusiastically. The following quote illustrates the issue- "Providing uniform to newly arrived FWs is important and necessary for their proper identification. It will also be helpful for creating a good impression."- respondent III (one agent of migrant labour).

Respondents VI, VII, VIII and IX agreed strongly and mentioned that employers or agents should provide uniforms. Conversely, the representative of the Malaysian Employers Federation (respondent I), one manager—in plantation (respondent II), one factory manager—in manufacturing (respondent IV) and one factory manager—in construction (respondent V) were neutral in answering the issue.

Orientation Program

- a) First orientation program in Malaysia: All Informants (N=9) granted the issue, for example-"First formal orientation program in the destination country for foreign workers should be in detail including all relevant issues. But most of the time, it does not happen. Especially small and medium size companies are not interested in arranging such formal training. Even in plantation and construction sectors, it is rare to arrange. Most big manufacturing companies are regular for the orientation program."- respondent I (representative of Malaysian Employers Federation). They agreed that orientation must be compulsory for entire industries. Finally, it was emphasised by all of them (N=9), that without formal training, it would not be possible to create skilled workers.
- b) Duration of Orientation: Respondent I expressed his opinion that three days would be enough in most cases, especially for medium and small-size companies. But for large-size companies, it would be at least one week. The rest of the Informants (II to IX) expressed the same opinion.

Medical Screening (MS)

- a. MS once every two years: The proposition was passionately supported by Informants III, VI, VII, VIII and IX (N=5). The following quote illustrates the issue-"No need for medical Screening is in every year. It may be done once every two years or every alternative year from the beginning of employment. Every year medical check-up creates a huge burden on FWs shoulders due to time and money involved in it."- a senior leader of migrant workers (respondent IX). Conversely, respondents I, II, IV and V (N=4) did not endorse the idea.
- b. To treat unfit workers: Some respondents (N=5 group) opined for unfit workers in medical Screening in Malaysia, there should be some systems to treat them rather than compulsory repatriation due to incurring lots of money for migration purposes. However, in this issue, N=4 group respondents opposed the proposal.

Qualitative findings (Repatriation phase)

Duties of source country's government

- a. Providing information about employment: FWs' country government may help them in various ways after their return to their homeland. Some respondents (N=5) supported the proposal highly; for instance- "Foreign workers' government may help them to resettle in their home country after their return by providing information or consultation about employment or starting a business."- one journalist of labour migration issues (respondent VIII).

It was highly appreciated by Informants III (one agent of migrant labour), VI (labour councillor of source country A) VII (labour councillor of source country B), IX (one senior leader of migrant labour). On the other hand, some informants (N=4) were not serious about the issue. For example, a representative of the Malaysian Employers Federation (respondent I) spoke frankly-"We have no headache about FWs' employment after their repatriation from Malaysia. It is not our duty". Respondents II (one factory manager- plantation), IV (one factory manager- manufacturing) and V (one factory manager- construction) opined the same.

- b. Laying out training programmes: Respondent IX (one senior leader of migrant labour) emphasised the issue in the following way- "Our country government should help the returnee migrants by providing various educational and training programmes for their resettlement. It will immensely guide our workers after repatriation". Respondents III, IV, VII and VIII endorsed the issue. Informants I, II, IV and V (N=4) again showed their reluctance to the proposal.
- c. Online job-matching platform: "N=5" group respondents raised the issue and suggested it enthusiastically. The following quote illustrates the issue- "FWs' country government can assist them in finding employment in their home countries through an online job-matching platform after their repatriation. In this modern age, it might happen easily because the internet is available everywhere. Therefore, it is needed just an initiative"- respondent III (one agent of migrant labour).

Respondents VI, VII, VIII and IX agreed on it strongly and mentioned employment would be easier for many FWs who expect to return to their home country after finishing the contract. Conversely, informants I, II, IV and V (N=4) were neutral in answering the issue, for example- "It is not our duty, but the proposal might help FWs if their government would arrange it"- one factory manager- manufacturing (respondent IV). The rest of them (informants I, II and V) had the same opinion.

d. Sharing stories: Informant VIII advocated it firmly and said-

"Foreign workers' country government may help returnee workers for their next employment by organising various programs of former migrant workers who have successfully reintegrated to share their stories". Respondents III and IX supported the idea.

Duties of foreign worker's company

a. Providing career certificate: Surprisingly, all respondents from I to IX (N=9) advocated the issue boldly, for instance-

"A career certificate provided by FWs' company and attested by relevant ministry of Malaysia verifying FW's work experiences would help them to find a next suitable job in their home country. It would also ensure SDG 08: decent work for all"- Labour councillor of source country A (respondent VI). Regardless of their position, the rest of the interviewees thought the same. However, respondent I mentioned- "Normally we provide certificates if the returnee workers desire. Further, it would be more effective if the relevant ministry could attest and authorise it".

b. Departure guarantee insurance: Labour councillor of source country B (respondent VII) defended the issue- "Departure guarantee insurance might help FWs to go back his/her country of origin smoothly. Some developed countries, for example, South Korea introduced it many years ago".

Duties of the destination country's government

a. Extended work permit: Some interviewees (N=5) advocated the issue strongly. Labour councillor of source country A (informant VI) said- "Normally foreign worker's contract for employment in Malaysia is too short- two or three years- this is not sustainable for contributing to development. Those who have performed well, their work permit may be extended up to company owner's desire". It was well supported by respondents III, VII, VIII and IX. In this connection, interviewees I, II, IV and V (N=4) stated carefully. The following quote illustrates the issue- "One temporary foreign worker could stay in Malaysia for up to 10 years if employers might renew his permit. Otherwise we also in favour of extending more only for expert ones if the government allows."- one factory manager- construction (respondent V).

b. Providing PR: One journalist of labour migrant issues (respondent VIII) stated- "Those who proved their better performance, Malaysian government might give them PR (Permanent Residence) like other developed countries for sustainable development of both sides. Respondents III, VI, VII and IX supported the proposal highly and said it would bring enthusiasm to the labour migration system in Malaysia. In contrast, "N=4" group interviewees (respondents I, II, IV and V) were against the idea. Respondent II (one manager- in the plantation sector) said- "In Malaysia, PR is given only for expatriates (high professional). We thought it would not be necessary for lower-level workers".

c. To reduce illegal FWs: Above activities will reduce the number of illegal and irregular migrant workers in Malaysia more effectively - all respondents, irrespective of position, agreed on it.

Quantitative findings (Placement phase)

The descriptive statistics for the various constructs of foreign workers' placement are provided in Table 3. With a minimum rating of 1 (strongly disagree) and a maximum rating of 5 (strongly agree), the mean ratings for various dimensions were between 3.87 and 3.93. The highest mean score was orientation program after arrival (M = 3.93, SD = 1.11), whilst the lowest mean score was medical check-up after arrival (M = 3.87, SD = 1.13).

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of various dimensions of foreign workers' placement.

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Arrival Procedures	1	5	3.88	1.22
Orientation Program after arrival	1	5	3.93	1.11
Medical check-up after arrival	1	5	3.87	1.13

For all variables, mean differences were markedly small between the respondents based on their education level. It means most informants had the same opinion (supported) to the proposals stated in this study. We had four educational groups. These were- did not attend school, primary level, secondary level and higher secondary or above. However, based on education level, "did not attend school" and "primary level" were identified as "low-level educational background respondents". Likewise, "secondary" and "higher secondary respondents" were recognised as "high-level educational background respondents" in this study for further analysis of outcomes. Therefore, high-level educational background respondents were also treated as reference group here.

A One-Way ANOVA test was conducted as a parametric test for the study to understand significant differences between the groups based on respondents' educational levels [21]. The following table shows the summary of the ANOVA test results-

Table 4. Summary of ANOVA test results.

IV	DV	F	p-Value	Effect Size (Eta Squared)
Education Level of the respondents	Arrival Procedures	(3, 296) = 2.407	.067	.02
	Orientation program	(3, 285) = 1.389	.246	.01
	Medical check-up	(3, 296) = 2.359	.072	.02

The one-way ANOVA test results showed that there were no significant differences between the following DVs and the educational background of the participants (IV)-

- arrival procedures (F (3, 296) = 2.407, $p = .067$)
- orientation program (F (3, 285) = 1.389, $p = .246$)
- medical check-up (F (3, 296) = 2.359, $p = .072$)

The effect sizes, calculated using eta squared, were .02, .01 and .02 (arrival procedures, orientation program and medical check-up, respectively), which means the actual differences in mean scores between the groups (respondents based on the low-level and high-level educational background) were markedly small.

Quantitative findings (Repatriation phase)

The descriptive statistics for the various constructs of foreign workers' recruitment are provided in Table 5. With a minimum rating of 1 (strongly disagree) and a maximum rating of 5 (strongly agree), the mean ratings for various dimensions were between 3.92 and 4.02. The highest mean score was onuses of FWs' company (M = 4.02, SD = .806), whilst the lowest mean score was duties of source country's government (M = 3.92, SD = .904).

Table 5. Descriptive statistics of various dimensions of foreign workers' repatriation.

Variables	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Duties of source country's government	1	5	3.92	.904
Onuses of FWs' company	1	5	4.02	.806
Duties of the destination country's government	1	5	3.96	.832

A One-Way ANOVA test was conducted as a parametric test for the study to understand significant differences between the groups, based on respondents' educational levels [21]. Table 6 exhibits the summary of the ANOVA test outcomes-

Table 6. Summary of ANOVA test results.

IV (Independent variables)	DV (Dependent Variables)	F	p-Value	Effect Size (Eta Squared)
Education level of the respondents	Duties of source country's government	F (3, 277) = 1.017	.386	.011
	Onuses of FWs' company	F (3, 269) = .887	.448	.009
	The obligation of the destination country's government	F (3, 268) = .975	.405	.010

The one-way ANOVA test results showed that there were no significant differences between the following DVs and the educational background of participants (IV)-

- duties of source country's government (F (3, 277) = 1.017, $p = .386$)
- onuses of FWs' company (F (3, 269) = .887, $p = .448$)
- obligation of destination country's government (F (3, 268) = .975, $p = .010$)

The effect sizes, calculated using eta squared, were .011, .009 and .010 (duties of source country's government, onuses of FWs' company and obligation of destination country's government, respectively), which means that the actual differences in mean scores between the groups (respondents based on the low-level and high-level educational background) were markedly small.

DISCUSSION

Placement phase

From the qualitative findings, it was evident that interviewees were mainly divided into two groups in their opinions of the proposals. The 'N = 5' group supported the themes in most cases. These interviewees included one agent of migrant

workers (respondent III), labour councillors of source countries A and B (respondents VI and VII, respectively), one journalist in the labour migration sector (respondent VIII), and one senior leader of working migrant labourers (respondent IX). Their opinions were based on real scenarios and the betterment of all parties engaged in FWs' employment in Malaysia. In contrast, the other respondents ('N = 4' group) were opposed to almost every proposal. They represented the Malaysian Employers Federation (respondent I), one factory manager—plantation (respondent II), one factory manager—manufacturing (respondent IV) and one factory manager—construction (respondent V). They had no issues with foreign workers' rights and sustainability. Gaining profits or company benefits influenced their opinions.

From the quantitative findings, the One-Way ANOVA test results showed that there were no significant differences in DVs among the respondents' groups on the issues of arrival procedures and medical check-ups. The *p*-values indicated that respondents' opinions on the proposals were mostly the same. The effect size also revealed markedly small differences in mean scores between the groups. Furthermore, SPSS recoding analysis (Table 7) revealed that the result was remarkably positive in supporting the proposals mentioned above.

Table 7. SPSS recoding analysis (Placement phase).

Dependent variable	The SPSS recoding result	Opinion on the proposal
Arrival Procedures	71.3% of respondents, irrespective of education level	Supported
Orientation Program after arrival in Malaysia	53.3% of respondents, irrespective of education level	Supported
Medical Screening after arrival in Malaysia	61.7% of respondents, irrespective of education level	Supported

From the qualitative and quantitative discussions, the study emphasised the 'N = 5' group and most respondents' opinions, regardless of education level, who strongly supported the proposals. The 'N = 4' group and some respondents (mostly of low-level educational background) commonly did not want any changes, because of impacts on the profit and lack of consciousness, respectively. Thus, the study concludes that to increase workforce contributions and sustainability (in line with SDG 08), it is essential at the FWs' placement phase to:

1. Address arrival procedures adequately,
2. Consider medical check-up issues after arrival,
3. Ensure a compulsory orientation program for newly selected foreign workers.

Table 8 summarises qualitative and quantitative outcomes in the deployment stage.

Table 8. Summary of qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

Phase	Findings	Short Form
Deployment phase	To receive within 24 hours of arrival	To receive within 24 hours
	To assist in clearance through immigration and custom	To assist in immigration/custom
	To provide uniforms at the port of disembarkation	To provide uniform
	To confirm the first orientation program in Malaysia	To ensure the first orientation program
	Medical Screening once every two years	MS once every two years
	To treat unfit workers through Medical Screening rather than compulsory repatriation	To treat unfit workers

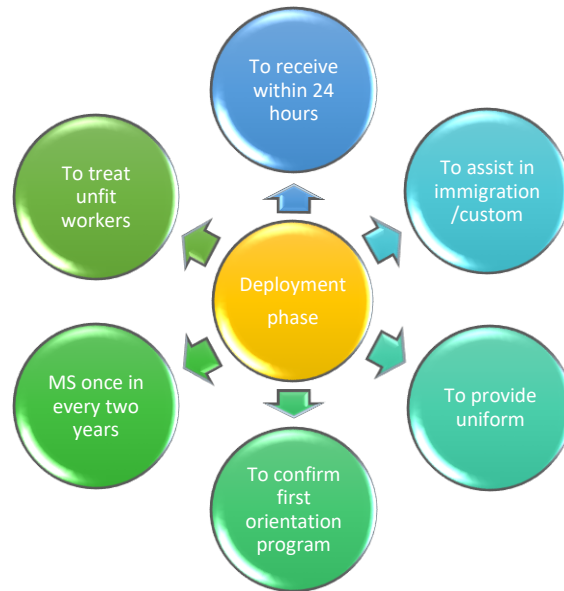


Figure 2. Factors that should reconsider at the deployment phase.

Repatriation phase

From the qualitative findings, it was evident that interviewees were mainly divided into two groups in their opinions of the proposals. The 'N = 5' group supported the themes in most cases. These interviewees included one agent of migrant workers (respondent III), labour councillors of source countries A and B (respondents VI and VII, respectively), one journalist in the labour migration sector (respondent VIII), and one senior leader of working migrant labourers (respondent IX). Their opinions were based on real scenarios and the betterment of all parties engaged in FWs' employment in Malaysia. In contrast, the other respondents ('N = 4' group) were opposed to almost every proposal. They represented the Malaysian Employers Federation (respondent I), one factory manager—plantation (respondent II), one factory manager—manufacturing (respondent IV) and one factory manager—construction (respondent V). They had no issues with foreign workers' rights and sustainability. Gaining profits or company benefits influenced their opinions. Surprisingly, the 'N = 4' group favoured the proposal for providing a career certificate.

From the quantitative findings, the One-Way ANOVA test results showed no significant differences in DVs among the respondents' groups on the duties of source country's government, onuses of FWs' company and obligation of destination country's government. The *p*-values indicated that respondents' opinions on the proposals were mostly the same. The effect size also revealed markedly small differences in mean scores between the groups. Furthermore, the SPSS recoding analysis (Table 9) showed that the result was remarkably positive in supporting the proposals mentioned above.

Table 9. SPSS recoding analysis.

Dependent Variables (DVs)	Proposals	SPSS recoding results	Education level	Opinion on the proposals
Duties of source country's government	To provide information about employment	69.7% respondents	Irrespective of education level	Supported
	To provide training program			
	Online job-matching platform			
	To share successful stories			
Onuses of FWs' company	To provide career certificate	72.7% respondents	Irrespective of education level	Supported
	Departure guarantee insurance			
Obligation of destination country's government	To extend work permit	66.3% respondents	Irrespective of education level	Supported
	To provide PR status			

From both the qualitative and quantitative discussions, the study emphasised the 'N = 5' group ('N = 9' group for providing a career certificate), and most respondents' opinions, regardless of education level, strongly supported the proposals. The 'N = 4' group and some respondents (mostly of low-level educational background) commonly did not want any changes because of impacts on the profit and lack of consciousness, respectively. Thus, the study concludes that to

ensure the smooth return and to decrease irregular or illegal migrant workers, it is important and necessary in the FWs' repatriation phase to:

1. Address source country's government duties properly,
2. Introduce the onuses of FWs' company,
3. Ensure the obligation of the destination country's government.

Table 10 shows the summary of qualitative and quantitative outcomes in the repatriation stage.

Table 10. Summary of qualitative and quantitative outcomes.

Issue	Findings	Short Form
Repatriation Phase	Providing information about employment by the FWs country government	To provide information about employment
	Providing various educational and training programs by the FWs country government	To provide a training program
	Arranging an Online job-matching platform by the FWs country government	Online job-matching platform
	Seeking help from successful returnees to share their stories	Sharing successful stories
	FWs company may provide career certificates to returnee workers	To provide a career certificate
	FWs company may introduce departure guarantee insurance for smooth repatriation	Departure guarantee insurance
	Destination country government may allow extended work permit for good performer workers	To extend a work permit
	The destination country's government may provide a "Permanent Residency" for those who proved their proficiency in different sectors	To provide PR status

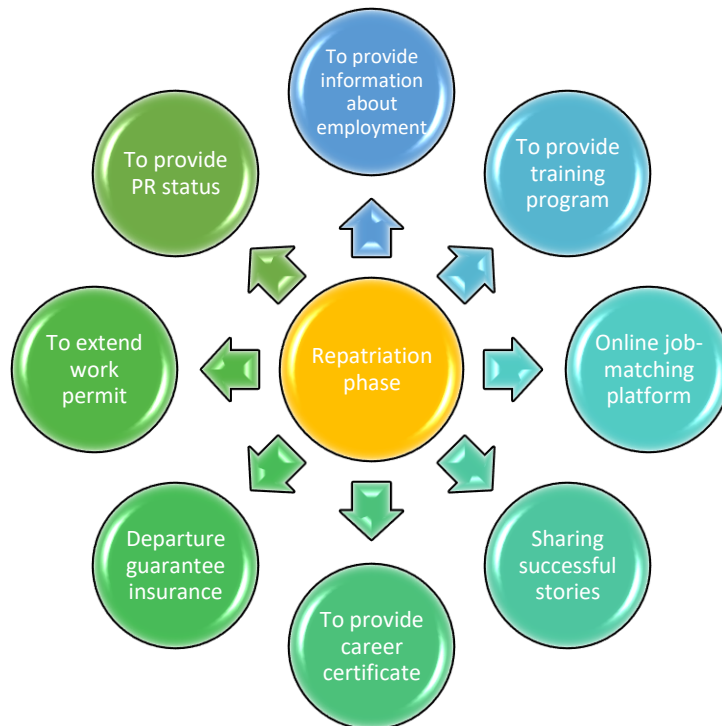


Figure 3. Reassessed factors that would ensure smooth repatriation for FWs in Malaysia.

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to identify some important factors at the placement and repatriation level of foreign workers in Malaysia that could promote the faultless deployment and impeccable return of FWs, and enhance sustainability in this sector. Our results highlighted the need to change some important policies in these two crucial phases of FWs.

Our findings endorsed that selected FWs' arrival procedures should be appropriately addressed, such as receiving within 24 hours of arrival at port of disembarkation, assisting them in immigration/customs and providing uniform identification of the workers. The agents or employers or by both of them must take these responsibilities. Moreover, the

study focused on the first orientation program, which is critical to confirm for newly arrived FWs. Every company, regardless of size, should emphasise the issue. Furthermore, medical Screening of FWs should be done once every two years. It is also highlighted that there should be some measures to treat unfit workers rather than compulsory repatriation. Our findings could help to change the policies related to foreign workers' placement in Malaysia. They will also guide the sustainable boosting of the workforce's contribution to society and the economy of Malaysia.

Secondly, in the repatriation phase, source countries' governments should introduce some initiatives for their labourers working abroad. These duties include providing information about further employment, arranging various training programs, launching an online job-matching platform and seeking help from successful returnees to share their experiences. In addition, FWs' companies must provide job experience certificates with attestation from the relevant ministry. This document will bring some flavour for the returnee workers to find the next suitable job worldwide. In addition, departure guarantee insurance would play another important role in smooth repatriation when financial availability invokes deciding to return. Finally, there are some obligations for the destination country government, Malaysia. Our study emphasised extending the work permit of foreign workers to those who proved their better performance up to the company owner's desire. Furthermore, the government should provide PR (permanent residence) status for these expert workers, similar to many developed countries worldwide. The proposals will be helpful for the suave return of migrant workers after finishing their employment contracts.

Our findings could help to change the policies related to foreign workers' deployment and repatriation in Malaysia. It will also guide the reduction of illegal or irregular foreign workers and the maltreatment of FWs inside Malaysia. SDG 08 will also be met if the proposals are implemented.

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APPENDIX A

Semi-Structured Questionnaire

Placement Phase
A. Arrival procedures
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think FWs should be received at the port of disembarkation after arrival? 2. Is it necessary to assist FWs with clearance through immigration and customs? 3. Do you support providing uniforms to FWs for easy identification at the airport?
B. Orientation program
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What do you think about the first orientation program for FWs after arrival in Malaysia? 2. What will be the duration of the program? 3. What will be the language?
C. Medical check-up after arrival
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is your opinion regarding FWs' medical check-ups after arrival in Malaysia? 2. How do you treat unfit workers? 3. Is the medical check-up necessary for FWs every year?
Repatriation Phase
D. Duties of source country's government
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For the resettlement/employment of FWs after their repatriation, how does the source country's government help their returnee workers? 2. Should they provide various educational or training programs for this purpose? 3. Do you think an online job-matching platform helps them? 4. How the former workers who have successfully reintegrated into their homeland may help the fresh returnee workers?
E. Onuses of FWs' own company
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Do you think a company should provide a career certificate? 2. Can the relevant ministry attest to this certificate to increase its authenticity and validity? 3. What about departure guarantee insurance?
F. Obligations of the destination country's government
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. For those who have performed well, do you think their work permit may be extended up to the company owner's desire? 2. Can the government provide PR status to those who proved their better performance? 3. Do you think the above activities will reduce illegal or irregular FWs in Malaysia and confirm smooth repatriation?

APPENDIX B

Survey Questionnaire

Please respond on the following scale:

For placement of foreign workers in destination country...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Arrival Procedures					
Foreign workers should be received at the port of disembarkation upon arrival					
Employers/agents or both parties should assist new foreign workers for clearance through immigration and custom upon arrival at the port of disembarkation					
Employers should provide uniforms to foreign workers for easy identification at the airport					
Orientation program					
The first orientation program in the destination country for foreign workers should be in detail, including all relevant issues					
The duration of the orientation program might be at least one week for all companies					
Language would be both English and Malay or the native language of foreign workers when necessary					
First medical check-up after arrival in Malaysia					
FOMEMA should do medical check-ups in source countries to reduce migrant worker's repatriation risk from the destination country					
For unfit workers in medical Screening, there should be some system to treat them than compulsory repatriation due to incurring lots of money for migration purposes					
Medical Screening is not necessary every year. It may be done once every two years or every alternative year					
For repatriation of foreign workers in Malaysia...	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Duties of source country's government					
Source country government may help workers to resettle in their homeland by providing information about employment or business					
FWs' country government may help them for their next employment by providing various educational and training programs					
FWs' own government can assist them through an online job-matching platform					
Source country government may seek help from former migrant workers who have successfully reintegrated to share their stories					
Onuses of FWs' own company					
A career certificate provided by FWs own company will help them to find the next suitable job in their home country					
If it is attested by the relevant ministry of Malaysia, verifying FWs' work experience might surge the possibility of getting a new job in their country of origin					

It will be helpful to ensure FWs' repatriation if companies arrange special insurance for departure					
Obligations of the destination country's government					
For those who have performed well, their work permit may be extended up to the company owner's desire					
The Malaysian government may give those who proved their better performance PR (Permanent Residence) like other developed countries.					
The above activities will reduce the number of illegal and irregular migrants in Malaysia					