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INDONESIAN DIPLOMACY IN FULFILLING THE RIGHT TO LEARN FOR CHILDREN OF INDONESIAN MIGRANT WORKERS IN JOHOR (2023-2025)

Suwarti Sari[1], Bimbi Rianda[2]
[12]Department of International Relations, Faculty of Social and Political Science, Universitas Jenderal Achmad Yani
[1]suwarti.sari@lecture.unjani.ac.id, [2]bimbi.rianda13@gmail.com

Abstract

This article examines Indonesia's educational diplomacy in fulfilling the right to learn for children of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor, Malaysia. Departing from prior studies that emphasize labor protection, school access, or CLC implementation in Sabah and Sarawak, this study foregrounds negotiation of undocumented migrant children in Peninsular Malaysia. Its novelty lies in conceptualizing Community Learning Centers as a quiet diplomacy instrument that mediates human rights obligations, migrant protection, and sovereignty. The article contributes to citizen-protection diplomacy by showing how education becomes a transnational mechanism of rights fulfillment and national identity preservation.

Keyword: Migrant workers, Children, Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

The movement of Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia has never been merely a question of employment. It is part of a wider story of economic inequality, family separation, legal uncertainty, and the everyday struggle of Indonesian citizens who seek better livelihoods beyond national borders. Malaysia's stronger economic position, including its GDP per capita of USD 11,874.4 in 2024, has made the country one of the most important destinations for Indonesian workers (World Bank, 2024). In Johor, many Indonesian migrant workers are employed in domestic work, plantations, construction, services, and other labor-intensive sectors. Their presence supports Malaysia's economy, yet it also produces a complicated social reality: many of their children grow up in a legal and administrative space that is uncertain, fragile, and often invisible.

This article begins with a central puzzle. If education is widely recognized as a basic right of every child, why does access to education become so difficult for the children of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor?

The Convention on the Rights of the Child affirms that every child has the right to education on the basis of equal opportunity (UNICEF, 1989; OHCHR, 1989). However, this principle becomes difficult to implement when children live in the territory of a host state whose immigration system is shaped by border control, legal documentation, and national administrative order. The issue is therefore not simply whether these children need schools. Rather, the deeper question is how a sending state can protect its citizens' basic rights when those citizens are located inside another state's sovereign jurisdiction.

The Johor case brings this tension into sharp focus. On the one hand, Indonesia has a constitutional and moral responsibility to protect the educational rights of its citizens, including children of migrant workers abroad. On the other hand, Malaysia has the authority to regulate migration, control access to public services, and determine the legal status of non-citizens within its territory. This creates a difficult diplomatic space between sovereignty and humanitarian norms, between immigration control and the right to education, and between public advocacy and quiet negotiation. In this context, education becomes more than a social service. It becomes a field of diplomatic negotiation.

Previous studies have made important contributions to the discussion of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. Some have examined labor protection, legal vulnerability, access to public services, and the role of Indonesian schools or Community Learning Centers in Sabah and Sarawak. Other studies have discussed undocumented children in Malaysia by focusing on legal identity, citizenship status, and exclusion from formal education (Loganathan et al., 2021; Loganathan et al., 2022). However, much of this literature still treats education mainly as a problem of service delivery or migrant protection. Less attention has been given to the diplomatic meaning of education itself: how educational access becomes a way for Indonesia to negotiate protection, maintain national responsibility, and work within the limits of Malaysia's sovereignty.

This is where the Johor case becomes academically significant. Unlike Sabah and Sarawak, which have received more attention in earlier studies, Johor is located in Peninsular Malaysia, where the political and administrative space for migrant education is more limited. Public schools in Malaysia generally prioritize citizens, while undocumented and non-citizen children often depend on alternative forms of education. This condition requires Indonesia to adopt a more careful and adaptive diplomatic strategy. Formal negotiations alone are not enough. Indonesian representatives must also engage local actors, employers, diaspora networks, education officials, and community-based institutions while avoiding unnecessary political friction.

This article argues that Community Learning Centers in Johor should not be understood only as informal schools for migrant children. They are also instruments of quiet diplomacy. Through these centers, Indonesia attempts to fulfill children's right to education, preserve their connection to Indonesian identity, and protect citizens abroad without openly challenging Malaysia's sovereignty. This makes the Johor case important for the study of international diplomacy and migration governance. It shows that citizen protection is not limited to legal aid, repatriation, or emergency response. It can also take the form of educational diplomacy that operates quietly, gradually, and pragmatically in the everyday lives of migrant communities.

Based on this argument, the article asks: how does Indonesia use educational diplomacy to fulfill the right to learn for children of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor, and what does this case reveal about the tension between sovereignty, humanitarian norms, and migration governance?

Diplomacy in Protecting Educational Rights

The protection of educational rights for children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia cannot be seen simply as a matter of building schools or providing learning spaces. It is part of a much wider diplomatic problem, where migration, sovereignty, human rights, and state responsibility meet in a complex and often sensitive way. For Indonesia, these children are not

outside the reach of national responsibility simply because they live across the border. They remain part of the Indonesian community whose basic rights, including the right to education, must be protected. For Malaysia, however, their presence is connected to immigration control, legal documentation, and the regulation of public services within its sovereign territory. This is the point where education becomes more than a social issue. It becomes a diplomatic question.

Previous studies on Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia have helped explain many important aspects of this issue. Some have discussed labor protection, legal vulnerability, access to public services, and the development of Indonesian schools or Community Learning Centers in Sabah and Sarawak. These studies are valuable because they show how migrant workers and their families experience layered forms of exclusion. However, much of the existing literature still tends to describe the problem institutionally: what policies exist, what services are provided, and what obstacles remain. Less attention has been given to the diplomatic meaning of these educational initiatives, especially how Indonesia negotiates the protection of its citizens within the legal and political boundaries of the Malaysian state.

This article therefore places the Johor case within the broader literature on migration diplomacy. Adamson and Tsourapas understand migration diplomacy as the use of cross-border population mobility in diplomatic relations between states. This perspective is useful because it shows that migration is not only a humanitarian or administrative issue, but also a field of negotiation. In the case of Johor, the presence of Indonesian migrant workers and their children creates a difficult diplomatic situation. Indonesia has an obligation to protect its citizens, while Malaysia has the authority to regulate migrants and non-citizens within its territory. The education of migrant children is therefore located between two competing logics: the logic of protection and the logic of sovereignty.

The literature on non-citizen and undocumented children in Malaysia also provides an important foundation for this study. Loganathan and colleagues show that many non-citizen children in Malaysia face serious barriers to formal education because access to public schools is closely tied to citizenship, documentation, and legal identity. This means that educational exclusion is not caused only by poverty or distance from schools. It is also produced by legal and administrative systems that determine who is visible, recognized, and entitled to public services. Children of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor experience this problem directly. Many of them live in a fragile administrative position, where their right to learn exists in principle but remains difficult to realize in practice.

However, the existing literature on non-citizen children in Malaysia has not fully explained how a sending state responds diplomatically to this exclusion. This is where the Johor case offers an important contribution. Indonesia does not simply provide education as a domestic service abroad. It must negotiate, adjust, and carefully position its educational initiatives so that they can operate within Malaysian territory. In this sense, Community Learning Centers are not only alternative schools. They are also diplomatic spaces where Indonesia tries to protect children without openly challenging the authority of the host state.

This article also draws from the literature on citizen-protection diplomacy. Traditionally, the protection of citizens abroad is often associated with legal assistance, consular services, evacuation, repatriation, or emergency response. The Johor case broadens this understanding. Protection does not always appear in moments of crisis. It can also take the form of long-term educational support that prevents children from falling into deeper vulnerability. Through curriculum standardization, student registration, learning certification, and pathways for further education in Indonesia, the Indonesian government uses education as a preventive form of protection. It protects not only the legal status of citizens, but also their future, identity, and sense of belonging.

The discussion is also connected to educational diplomacy and soft power. Education has often been understood as a way for states to build influence, transmit values, and strengthen relations with foreign societies. Wojciuk, Michałek, and Stormowska argue that education can become a source and tool of soft power in international relations. Yet the Johor case shows a slightly different function of education. Here, education is not mainly directed at attracting foreign publics. Instead, it is used to protect Indonesian children abroad and to maintain their connection with Indonesian language, curriculum, civic identity, and national community. This makes the case important because it expands the meaning of educational diplomacy from external influence to citizen protection and identity preservation.

At the conceptual level, this article uses quiet diplomacy not merely as a label, but as an analytical tool. Quiet diplomacy refers to a low-profile and non-confrontational diplomatic approach used to manage sensitive issues without provoking unnecessary resistance from the host state. In this study, quiet diplomacy can be understood through four indicators. First, it involves limited public visibility, meaning that diplomatic efforts are not always displayed openly in public or on social media. Second, it depends on continuous informal and technical communication with relevant authorities and local actors. Third, it seeks tolerance or limited recognition from the host state rather than demanding immediate and full policy change. Fourth, it prioritizes the continuity of protection over symbolic diplomatic victory.

These indicators help distinguish quiet diplomacy from public diplomacy and formal bilateral diplomacy. Public diplomacy usually depends on visibility, public messaging, and broader audience engagement. Formal bilateral diplomacy relies on official negotiations, agreements, and institutional commitments between governments. Quiet diplomacy works differently. It relies on restraint, discretion, trust-building, and gradual accommodation. Its success should therefore not be measured only by whether it produces public recognition or formal declarations. It should also be measured by whether it reduces diplomatic friction, keeps learning spaces

open, secures practical access to education, and prevents the closure of initiatives that serve vulnerable children.

This framework is especially relevant in Johor because the education of undocumented or irregular migrant children is politically sensitive in Peninsular Malaysia. Excessive publicity may create pressure on local authorities, trigger public resistance, or invite stricter enforcement. In this context, a quiet and careful approach may be more effective than direct public advocacy. The purpose is not to avoid the rights issue, but to protect the continuity of educational access in a political environment where open confrontation could harm the very children the policy seeks to protect.

The Community Learning Center therefore needs to be understood as both an educational institution and a diplomatic instrument. It stands in the middle of a tension between Indonesia's responsibility to educate its citizens and Malaysia's authority to regulate what happens within its territory. The CLC does not erase this tension. It manages it. It creates a limited but meaningful space where Indonesian children can continue learning, remain connected to their national identity, and gain access to future educational pathways in Indonesia.

The Johor case is also important because it differs from the more commonly discussed cases of Sabah and Sarawak. In Sabah and Sarawak, Indonesian educational initiatives have developed through earlier precedents, including the establishment of the Indonesian School in Kota Kinabalu and the growth of CLCs in plantation areas. In Johor and other parts of Peninsular Malaysia, the political and administrative space is more restricted. Authorities tend to be more cautious in recognizing educational services for migrant children, particularly when those children are undocumented or connected to informal labor migration. This makes Johor a useful case for understanding how protection diplomacy works when the room for formal recognition is limited.

By bringing these discussions together, this article positions the Johor case within broader debates on migration diplomacy, citizen-protection

diplomacy, educational diplomacy, and transnational governance. The article argues that the education of migrant children should not be treated only as a humanitarian or administrative concern. It is also a diplomatic practice shaped by sovereignty, legal status, and migration governance. At the same time, the article refines the concept of quiet diplomacy by showing that its effectiveness lies not in public visibility, but in its ability to sustain protection in difficult political conditions. Indonesia's educational diplomacy in Johor therefore represents a human-centered form of diplomacy: quiet in method, but significant in its consequences for children whose futures depend on access to learning.

Socio-Economic Profile of Migrant Workers in Johor

The socio-economic profile of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor is important not merely as background information, but as an analytical entry point for understanding why educational diplomacy becomes necessary and why its effectiveness remains limited. Indonesian migration to Malaysia is shaped by structural economic inequality between the two countries. Malaysia continues to attract Indonesian workers because it offers wider employment opportunities and relatively higher income prospects compared to many migrant-sending regions in Indonesia. For workers from provinces such as East Java, West Nusa Tenggara, Central Java, and North Sumatra, migration is often seen not simply as an individual choice, but as a household strategy to respond to low wages, limited employment opportunities, and economic insecurity at home.

Based on 2024 data, the number of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia reached approximately 2.5 million, making Malaysia the largest destination country for Indonesian migrant workers. In Johor alone, around 300,000 Indonesian migrant workers were recorded in 2023. Most of them are employed in labor-intensive sectors commonly categorized as 3D jobs: dirty, difficult, and dangerous. These include plantations, domestic work, construction, services, and manufacturing. The concentration of Indonesian workers in these sectors reflects their vulnerable position in the Malaysian labor market. Many workers occupy jobs that are economically necessary but

socially and legally precarious. This vulnerability becomes even more complex when migrant workers form families and raise children in the host country.

The distribution of these sectors is as follows:

1. Plantation and Agriculture Sector (35%): This is the largest sector, with an estimated 875,000 workers, often living in isolated, rural farms.
2. Domestic Work (30%): This includes approximately 750,000 workers, the majority of whom are informal migrant workers or domestic workers employed by private employers.
3. Construction Sector (25%): This involves an estimated 625,000 workers supporting the development of modern infrastructure in Malaysia.
4. Services and Manufacturing Sector (10%): This involves approximately 250,000 workers across various industries.

In terms of educational profile, most Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia have relatively low formal education. Approximately 68 percent have only completed junior high school, and around 43 percent lack specialized formal skills. This condition weakens their bargaining position in the labor market and increases their dependence on employers, recruitment networks, and informal survival strategies. For their children, this socio-economic background creates a double vulnerability. On the one hand, children inherit the insecurity of their parents' labor status. On the other hand, they face barriers to education that may reproduce the same cycle of low skills, limited mobility, and structural poverty across generations.

Table 1 presents the gap between the number of children who have access to education and the estimated number of children who remain outside formal educational provision.

Table 1. Population and Access to Education for Children of Indonesian Migrant Workers in Johor

Data Categories	Year	Number of children	information
Access to Formal Education	2022	350	Registered and studying at the Indonesian School of Johor Bahru (SIJB).
Access to Formal Education	2023	407	Children who have access to education through the Johor Bahru Indonesian School (SIJB).
School Age Children	2023	1.597	Total number of school-age children registered in Johor region.
Undocumented Children	2024	2.500	Estimate of school-age children who do not have official documents and cannot access formal education.
Total Estimate	2025	>2.850	Estimated total number of children of migrant workers, including both legal and illegal groups.

Source: processed by researchers

The table shows that Indonesia's educational intervention has created a concrete but still limited channel of access. The increase from 350 students in 2022 to 407 students in 2023 indicates that the Indonesian School of Johor Bahru has expanded its reach. However, when this number is compared with the 1,597 school-age children recorded in Johor in 2023, only around one quarter of the children were able to access formal education through SIJB. The gap becomes even wider when the estimate of 2,500 undocumented school-age children in 2024 and more than 2,850 total children in 2025 is considered. This means that the existing institutional response has not yet matched the scale of educational need.

This finding is important for evaluating the effectiveness of Indonesia's educational diplomacy. The existence of SIJB and Community Learning Centers demonstrates that Indonesia has moved beyond rhetorical commitment and has created practical mechanisms for education delivery

abroad. However, effectiveness should not be measured only by the existence of institutions or the number of learning centers established. It should also be assessed through access coverage, student retention, completion rates, certification outcomes, transition to further education, and long-term reintegration into Indonesian society. Based on the available data in this article, the strongest evidence of policy effectiveness lies in access creation, not yet in measurable educational outcomes.

The data also reveal the limitations of the current CLC model. CLCs are important because they provide learning opportunities for children who would otherwise remain outside the education system. They also help maintain students' connection to the Indonesian curriculum, language, and national identity. Nevertheless, the model remains constrained by documentation problems, limited facilities, dependence on diplomatic tolerance, uneven geographic coverage, and the absence of systematic outcome evaluation. Without data on attendance consistency, graduation rates, student performance, continuation to senior secondary education, or reintegration after returning to Indonesia, it is difficult to determine whether CLCs merely provide temporary access or whether they truly improve the life chances of migrant children.

This section therefore suggests that the socio-economic vulnerability of Indonesian migrant workers in Johor directly shapes the educational vulnerability of their children. The tables are not only descriptive data; they show the structural gap that educational diplomacy seeks to address. At the same time, the data also demonstrate that Indonesia's current response remains partial. The policy has succeeded in opening access, but the available evidence is not yet sufficient to conclude that it has produced strong educational outcomes or long-term social mobility. For this reason, future evaluation of Indonesia's educational diplomacy in Johor should include indicators such as enrollment growth, student retention, completion rates, learning achievement, diploma recognition, transition to higher levels of education, and the social reintegration of children who return to Indonesia.

Citizenship Status and Administrative Obstacles

The presence of children of Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) in Johor is a complex social consequence of the dynamics of labor migration. Although Malaysian immigration regulations explicitly prohibit foreign workers in the informal sector, such as domestic workers, factory workers, and plantation workers, from marrying or bringing families, many PMIs continue to form relationships, marry religiously, and give birth to children in the region. This situation creates a systemic layer of problems that encompasses legal, psychological, and access to basic rights issues.

The primary problem faced by PMI children in Johor is the threat of becoming stateless. This is driven by several administrative factors:

1. Prohibition on Marriage and Family: Malaysian government regulations in certain regions prohibit informal migrant workers from marrying, leaving children born from such relationships without clear legal status in their country of birth.
2. Lack of Official Documentation: Many children are born to parents who lack valid marriage documents, or to PMIs with non-procedural or illegal status.
3. National Identity Crisis: Limited access to the Indonesian curriculum and the influence of the local environment mean these children are more familiar with Malaysian culture and social interactions than with their home country, Indonesia.

Data shows a significant disparity between the number of school-age children and the availability of access to formal education. This phenomenon can be seen in the following table:

Table 2. Projection of the Condition of Indonesian Migrant Workers' Children in the Johor Working Area (2022-2025)

Year	Child status	estimated quantity	Information
2022	Terdaftar di SIJB	350 Child	Access formal education at Johor Bahru Indonesian School (Primary/Junior High School).
2023	Populasi Usia Sekolah	1.597Child	Of the total 300,000 PMI in the Johor region that year.
2024	Undocumented	2.500 Child	School age children who cannot access education due to document constraints.
2025	Total estimate	>2.850 Child	Includes children of both legal and illegal workers (researcher estimates).

Source: processed by researchers

Only a small number of children (approximately 407 in 2023) have access to the Johor Bahru Indonesian School (SIJB). The rest are categorized as non-procedural children, a group of children whose administrative status is not recognized by either the Malaysian or Indonesian government, thus depriving them of their basic right to a quality education.

Children of undocumented migrant workers live between two state systems, without full protection from either. They experience social exclusion, with access to health services and protection from violence severely limited. Psychologically, their lack of legal status places them vulnerable to marginalization, discrimination, and potential future exploitation. This situation emphasizes that the plight of migrant workers in Johor is not simply an educational issue, but a violation of the universal principles of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which guarantees every individual's right to identity and protection. These children experience a significant national identity crisis; they are more exposed to Malaysian culture and social interactions than to Indonesian culture and social interactions. Without diplomatic intervention, they risk becoming a generation of stateless children.

Bilateral Negotiations and Educational Diplomacy

The Indonesian government responded to the complex issues facing migrant workers' children in Johor through an educational diplomacy approach, as evidenced by the establishment of the Community Learning Center (CLC). This strategy represents a concrete form of soft power diplomacy aimed at bridging the gap between Malaysia's restrictive immigration policies and Indonesia's constitutional responsibility to educate its citizens.

Indonesia's educational diplomacy toward Malaysia is a manifestation of its adaptive and sustainable citizen protection strategy. This dynamic is inseparable from the ebb and flow of relations between the two countries, which are often caught in tension between host-state sovereignty and home-state responsibility.

Negotiations on the educational rights of migrant children reached a crucial point through the Annual Consultation mechanism at the head-of-government level. In 2004, President Megawati Soekarnoputri and Prime Minister Abdullah Ahmad Badawi laid the foundation stone for an understanding that the children of migrant workers retain the right to education even if their parents work in the informal sector. This commitment was further strengthened on January 12, 2006, through the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) in Bukit Tinggi, specifically addressing the protection and fulfillment of basic needs for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). This culminated in the inauguration of the Kota Kinabalu Indonesian School (SIKK) in Sabah in 2008, the first model Indonesian school in a Malaysian plantation concession area.

Entering the 2023-2025 period, the focus of diplomacy shifted to Peninsular Malaysia, particularly Johor, which has stricter regulations than Sabah and Sarawak. Bilateral negotiations during this phase faced challenges due to Malaysia's national education policy, which provides access to public schools only to its citizens. In response, the Indonesian government, through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology, implemented a "Dual Track Diplomacy" strategy:

1. Formal Path (G-to-G): Through the renewal of the 2025 MoU, Indonesia successfully negotiated legal recognition for the Community Learning Center (CLC) as a non-formal educational institution recognized by the Malaysian education authorities.
2. Technical-Persuasive Path: The Indonesian Consulate General in Johor actively approaches employers to provide learning facilities for the children of their workers within plantation or industrial areas.

Although CLCs have expanded to several locations, including Muar, Bahau, Jelebu, Ladang Kosma, and Kuantan, their implementation in Peninsular Malaysia faces greater sovereignty challenges than in Sabah. The Malaysian government grants permits selectively and in limited quantities through regional education authorities. To maintain this continuity, the Indonesian Consulate General in Johor employs a strategy of quiet diplomacy and soft negotiation. One form of diplomatic compromise is limiting the publication of learning activities on social media to avoid diplomatic obstacles with local authorities. This demonstrates that Indonesian educational diplomacy must operate adaptively within the boundaries of host state sovereignty.

This diplomacy also involves integrating the national education system into Malaysia's sovereign territory. The Education and Culture Attaché (Atdikbud) in Kuala Lumpur acts as coordinator, ensuring:

1. Curriculum Standardization: The subject matter at the CLC remains based on the Indonesian national curriculum to maintain the national identity of the children of Indonesian migrant workers.
2. Dapodik System: Ensuring that all students in Johor are registered in the Basic Education Data, so they receive a valid National Student Identification Number (NISN) to continue their education to high school or university in Indonesia.

Through the Ministry of Education and Culture, the Indonesian government ensures that the learning process at the CLC is legally valid. CLC graduates are guaranteed a valid diploma recognized for continuing their

education to high school or vocational high school in Indonesia. The Indonesian Consulate General in Johor collaborates with the Atdikbud of the Indonesian Embassy in Kuala Lumpur and several Indonesian universities to provide scholarships and dormitories for outstanding students so they can return and contribute to national development. CLC operations, including teacher salaries and the procurement of teaching aids, are allocated through the state budget (APBN) as a form of the state's responsibility to protect its citizens abroad.

Overall, the CLC in Johor is not simply an alternative educational institution but a strategic instrument that transforms education into a transnational public good. This strategy demonstrates Indonesia's soft power in the ASEAN region, championing human rights through an inclusive, humanitarian approach.

Quiet Diplomacy

Indonesia’s efforts to provide educational access for the children of migrant workers in Johor are not merely administrative responses to a humanitarian problem. They represent a diplomatic strategy shaped by the tension between national responsibility and host-state sovereignty. In this case, Indonesia must protect the right to education of its citizens abroad, while at the same time avoiding direct confrontation with Malaysia’s immigration and education policies. This condition explains why quiet diplomacy becomes central to Indonesia’s approach.

Quiet diplomacy refers to a low-profile, discreet, and non-confrontational form of diplomatic engagement. It is usually used when an issue is politically sensitive, when public pressure may create resistance from the host state, and when practical access is more important than symbolic diplomatic recognition. In the Johor case, the education of undocumented or irregular migrant children falls into this category. If Indonesia were to frame the issue through open criticism or public pressure, the Malaysian authorities could respond defensively by tightening bureaucratic control or limiting the operational space of Community Learning Centers. Therefore, quiet diplomacy

becomes a pragmatic strategy to keep educational access open while minimizing diplomatic friction.

The Johor case suggests that quiet diplomacy is more effective than confrontational diplomacy under at least four conditions. First, it is more effective when the issue involves vulnerable groups whose protection could be harmed by public escalation. Children of Indonesian migrant workers need continuity of learning, not prolonged political contestation. Second, quiet diplomacy works better when the sending state has limited legal authority within the host state's territory. Indonesia cannot unilaterally establish schools in Malaysia without some degree of host-state tolerance. Third, it is useful when the host state is politically sensitive to migration, undocumented populations, or public service access for non-citizens. Fourth, quiet diplomacy becomes relevant when both states have broader bilateral interests that should not be destabilized by a single sensitive issue.

The success of quiet diplomacy in this case depends on several factors. The first factor is diplomatic trust. Indonesia's representatives must convince Malaysian authorities that the Community Learning Center is not a challenge to Malaysian sovereignty, but a practical humanitarian arrangement for children who would otherwise remain outside education. The second factor is bureaucratic flexibility. Because formal recognition may be difficult to obtain, Indonesian diplomats must work through technical coordination, limited permits, and informal understandings with local authorities. The third factor is the involvement of non-state actors. Employers, plantation companies, diaspora communities, Indonesian universities, and volunteer teachers help provide the social and institutional infrastructure that formal diplomacy alone cannot supply.

The fourth factor is controlled visibility. In Johor, excessive public exposure of CLC activities can create political risks. This is why the Indonesian Consulate General adopts a careful approach by limiting unnecessary publicity, especially on social media. This strategy should not be understood as secrecy for its own sake. Rather, it is a form of diplomatic risk

management. By keeping the issue away from public controversy, Indonesia can protect the continuity of learning activities and prevent the CLC from becoming a target of political or bureaucratic resistance.

The fifth factor is the ability to translate humanitarian claims into mutually acceptable language. Indonesia does not only present CLCs as a matter of children's rights. It also frames them as beneficial for employers and local stability. When companies provide learning spaces for the children of their workers, they are not only supporting a humanitarian cause but also strengthening worker loyalty, reducing anxiety among migrant families, and contributing to corporate social responsibility. This kind of framing allows Indonesia to transform a sensitive rights issue into a practical cooperation agenda.

Compared to public diplomacy, quiet diplomacy has both strengths and limitations. Its main strength lies in its ability to preserve access in politically sensitive situations. It allows Indonesia to work gradually, avoid open confrontation, and maintain communication with Malaysian authorities. However, quiet diplomacy also has weaknesses. Because it operates with limited public visibility, it may reduce transparency, limit public accountability, and make policy evaluation more difficult. It may also produce fragile outcomes because the continuity of CLCs depends heavily on informal tolerance rather than strong legal guarantees. Therefore, quiet diplomacy should not be romanticized as a complete solution. It is effective in opening and maintaining limited access, but it does not automatically solve the structural problem of undocumented migrant children.

The long-term effect of quiet diplomacy on Indonesia-Malaysia relations is ambivalent but strategically important. On the positive side, it helps prevent the education issue from becoming a source of bilateral conflict. By avoiding public confrontation, Indonesia can continue protecting its citizens while preserving cooperative relations with Malaysia in broader areas such as labor migration, border management, trade, and ASEAN cooperation. Quiet

diplomacy also allows both governments to manage a sensitive problem without forcing either side to publicly abandon its domestic position.

However, the same strategy may also delay deeper policy reform. If quiet diplomacy only maintains temporary access without pushing for clearer legal arrangements, the CLC model may remain vulnerable to changes in local political mood, bureaucratic discretion, or immigration enforcement. For this reason, quiet diplomacy should be understood as a first-stage strategy, not an end point. In the short term, it is useful for protecting children's access to learning. In the long term, it needs to be connected to more institutionalized bilateral arrangements, clearer recognition of learning centers, better student documentation, and measurable educational outcomes.

The theoretical contribution of this case lies in showing that quiet diplomacy is most useful when a sending state seeks to protect vulnerable citizens inside another state's territory but lacks the authority to act openly. Its effectiveness does not come from public pressure, but from discretion, trust-building, technical negotiation, controlled visibility, and the involvement of local non-state actors. The Johor case therefore expands the study of diplomacy by showing that quiet diplomacy is not merely the absence of publicity. It is a deliberate diplomatic method for managing the tension between humanitarian norms and sovereignty. In Indonesia's educational diplomacy, quiet diplomacy becomes a way to protect children without turning them into objects of political dispute.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis presented, this study concludes several fundamental points regarding Indonesian diplomacy in fulfilling the educational rights of migrant workers' children in Johor:

1. The case of Johor shows that the education of migrant children is not merely a problem of school access or social service delivery, but a diplomatic issue located at the intersection of migration governance, host-state sovereignty, humanitarian norms, and the sending state's responsibility to protect its citizens abroad. This case expands the

understanding of migration governance by showing that cross-border labor mobility produces not only employment issues, but also long-term questions concerning children, families, legal identity, and educational futures.

2. Community Learning Centers in Johor should be understood not only as alternative learning institutions, but also as instruments of quiet diplomacy. Through these centers, Indonesia creates a limited but meaningful educational space within Malaysia's sovereign territory. This finding contributes to the literature on educational diplomacy by showing that education can function not only as a soft power instrument toward foreign publics, but also as a mechanism of citizen protection, national identity preservation, and possible social reintegration for migrant children.
3. Indonesia's diplomatic strategy in Johor has succeeded in opening educational access for some children of Indonesian migrant workers, but its effectiveness remains partial and uneven. The available data show a significant gap between the estimated number of school-age migrant children and the number of children who can access formal or semi-formal Indonesian educational services. Therefore, claims about the success of Indonesian diplomacy should be made carefully. The strongest evidence points to access creation, not yet to comprehensive educational transformation.
4. The CLC model still faces important limitations. Its continuity depends on diplomatic tolerance, technical negotiation, employer support, limited facilities, and the political sensitivity of local authorities. In addition, the available data do not yet provide sufficient evidence on student retention, completion rates, learning achievement, diploma utilization, transition to higher education, or long-term reintegration into Indonesian society. These limitations show that CLCs are important but remain fragile as a model of migrant children's education.
5. The Johor case refines the concept of quiet diplomacy in the context of migrant protection. Quiet diplomacy is most effective when the sending

state seeks to protect vulnerable citizens inside another state's territory, when public confrontation may harm the protected group, and when practical continuity is more urgent than symbolic recognition. Its success is shaped by diplomatic trust, bureaucratic flexibility, controlled visibility, non-state actor involvement, and the ability to frame humanitarian protection as mutually acceptable cooperation.

6. Indonesia's educational diplomacy in Johor reveals both the promise and the fragility of human-centered diplomacy in migration governance. It shows that the state can remain present for vulnerable citizens abroad through education, even under legal and territorial constraints. At the same time, access alone is not enough. Future studies need to examine whether CLCs improve educational outcomes, strengthen national identity, support social reintegration, and help break the intergenerational cycle of vulnerability among migrant families.

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