

# The Indonesian Diaspora in Improving the Quality of Education: Public Policy Analysis and Human Resource Development

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Keyword: Indonesian diaspora; Immigrants; Alternative education; Public policy; Human resource development</p>	<p>The mobility of Indonesian migrant workers to Malaysia presents significant public policy challenges, particularly in ensuring the educational rights of immigrant children. Limitations in the host country's education policies, coupled with weak integration of policies for the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad, have resulted in several immigrant children being excluded from the formal education system. This article aims to analyse the role of the Indonesian diaspora in improving the quality of education for immigrant children in Malaysia and its implications for human resource development and public policy. This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a policy study design based on literature analysis and limited field data. Data were collected through a review of reputable journals indexed in Scopus and SINTA, policy documents, and reports from international organisations. The findings indicate that the Indonesian diaspora plays a significant role as a non-state actor in filling policy gaps by providing community-based alternative education, advocating for educational rights, and strengthening the basic capacities of immigrant children. However, these efforts face sustainability challenges due to the lack of formal recognition, limited funding, and weak bilateral policy coordination. This article emphasises the importance of cross-national collaborative policies that recognise and strengthen the diaspora's role as a strategic partner in building an inclusive, human rights-oriented education system.</p>

## INTRODUCTION

Globalization and regional economic integration have accelerated cross-border labor mobility, particularly in Southeast Asia. Indonesia and Malaysia share a long and complex migration relationship, characterized by the continuous flow of Indonesian migrant workers employed across various informal and semi-formal sectors in Malaysia (Bastide, 2015; Kurniati & Abdillah, 2025; Maksum, 2022). This mobility generates significant social consequences, one of which is the growing number of Indonesian immigrant children who live and develop in the host country. Indonesian immigrant children in Malaysia face multidimensional challenges in accessing education. National education policies in Malaysia generally prioritize citizens and permanent residents, while immigrant children, especially those without legal documentation, remain excluded from the formal education system (Loganathan et al., 2021). This condition contributes to high dropout rates and limited access to basic education, which in turn adversely affects the quality of human capital among migrant generations.

From a public policy perspective, education is a key instrument for human development and the alleviation of structural poverty (Ali et al., 2026; Fute et al., 2026; Gitonga et al., 2026). The state's inability to provide access to education for immigrant groups demonstrates a policy gap between international human rights norms and national policy implementation (DelaCruz et al., 2026; Kindt, 2026; Nordgren et al., 2026). Non-state actors, including the Indonesian diaspora, then fill this policy gap. The Indonesian diaspora in Malaysia functions not only as a social community but also as a non-state public policy actor directly involved in providing alternative education services. Through community schools, community learning centres, and community-based education initiatives, the diaspora strives to ensure that immigrant children continue to receive their right to basic education (Alan Gamlen, 2019; Alan Gamlen et al., 2019).

The phenomenon of limited access to education for immigrant children has broad implications for public policy, particularly regarding the state's role in ensuring equitable distribution of basic services (Evans et al., 2025; Landolt, 2025). Education, as a primary instrument of human development, demands policies that are not only administratively oriented but also inclusive and socially just (Cruz García et al., 2026; Ozeki & Mouri, 2026). When public policies fail to reach all groups in society, especially vulnerable groups such as immigrants, this reflects a gap between the policy's normative objectives and the reality of its implementation. In this context, public policies must be more adaptive and responsive to social dynamics, including cross-border population mobility, to better integrate human rights principles into their design and implementation.

From a human resource (HR) development perspective, limited access to education will directly impact individual quality and long-term competitiveness. Unequal education can create capacity gaps, low skills, and limited economic opportunities for future generations (Aftanorhan et al., 2025; Elhassan et al., 2026; Vuc et al., 2026). At the macro level, this condition can hamper productivity and diminish these groups' contributions to development. Therefore, inclusive public education policies are crucial to ensuring that every individual, regardless of social status or citizenship, has an equal opportunity to develop their potential. Thus, investment in education not only improves human resource quality but also contributes to more sustainable and equitable development.

Despite increasing recognition of the diaspora's role, academic studies in Indonesia remain relatively underrepresented in public policy analysis, particularly in the transnational education sector. Therefore, this article aims to analyse in-depth the role of the Indonesian diaspora in improving the quality of education for immigrant children in Malaysia, while also examining the implications of accompanying public policies within the framework of human resource development. Furthermore, this research aims to identify patterns of collaboration between state and non-state actors in providing inclusive alternative education services. This research also seeks to formulate policy recommendations to strengthen the diaspora's contribution to the sustainable improvement of human resource quality.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach with a policy study design grounded in a literature review and field data. This approach is chosen to obtain a comprehensive understanding of Indonesian immigrant children's education in Malaysia and the role of the diaspora in public policy. The research data were collected from several primary sources. First, a systematic literature review was conducted, covering reputable international journals indexed in Scopus, as well as nationally accredited SINTA journals relevant to migration, diaspora, and education policy issues. In addition, this study draws on academic books and policy reports published by international organisations, including OECD, the International Organisation for Migration (IOM), UNICEF, and UNESCO.

Second, optional field data are available for integration, including in-depth interviews with administrators of Indonesian diaspora community schools in Malaysia, questionnaires distributed to immigrant parents and children, and document analysis of reports produced by diaspora organisations. Third, the study examines policy documents, including Malaysian

education regulations and policies related to the protection of Indonesian citizens and the Indonesian diaspora abroad. Data analysis is conducted using a thematic policy analysis technique through several key stages: identifying central themes related to immigrant children’s access to education, the role of the diaspora, and state policies; interpreting the relationship between diaspora roles and public policy in the context of cross-border education; and developing a conceptual model that illustrates the position and contribution of the Indonesian diaspora within education policy for immigrant children in Malaysia.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### *Characteristics of Indonesian Immigrant Children and Access to Education*

The study results show that the majority of Indonesian immigrant children in Malaysia come from families of informal migrant workers. Limited legal documentation is a major barrier to accessing formal education. This finding aligns with the findings of Loganathan et al. (2021), who asserted that citizenship-based education policies create systemic exclusion for immigrant children (Loganathan et al., 2021).

**Table 1.** Barriers to Access to Education for Children of Indonesian Immigrants in Malaysia

Main Barriers	Impacts
Lack of documentation	Not admitted to public schools
Parents’ legal status	Risk of deportation
Structural poverty	Inability to afford private schooling
Language & cultural barriers	Difficulty in adaptation

The findings indicate that most Indonesian immigrant children in Malaysia come from families working in the informal sector, a condition that significantly shapes their access to education. Informal sector employment is often characterized by low income, job insecurity, and lack of legal protection, which in turn affects the ability of families to secure proper documentation for their children. The absence of legal identity documents becomes a primary barrier, as formal education systems in Malaysia require proof of citizenship or legal residency. This structural constraint reflects a broader issue where access to basic services is closely tied to legal status, thereby excluding vulnerable populations from fundamental rights such as education.

The lack of documentation not only prevents children from enrolling in public schools but also reinforces a cycle of invisibility and marginalization. Without official recognition, these children exist outside formal systems, making them difficult to track, support, or include in national development agendas. This aligns with previous studies highlighting how citizenship-based education policies systematically exclude immigrant populations. The policy framework, while administratively rational from a state perspective, creates unintended social consequences by denying children their right to education and limiting their future opportunities for upward mobility.

In addition to documentation issues, the legal status of parents further compounds the vulnerability of immigrant children. Families without proper legal standing often live under constant fear of detention or deportation, which discourages them from engaging with formal institutions, including schools. This creates a climate of uncertainty where education is deprioritized in favor of immediate survival. Structural poverty also plays a critical role, as many families cannot afford private or alternative schooling options. As a result, children are more likely to drop out or never enroll in school at all, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of low education and limited economic prospects.

Cultural and linguistic barriers add another layer of complexity to the problem. Differences in language and cultural norms can hinder children’s ability to adapt to formal education environments, even when access is available. These challenges often lead to lower academic performance, reduced confidence, and social exclusion within school settings. Taken together, these barriers illustrate that the issue of educational access for immigrant children is multidimensional, involving legal, economic, social, and cultural factors. Addressing this problem requires comprehensive and inclusive policy approaches that go beyond administrative requirements and focus on ensuring equitable access to education for all children, regardless of their background.

### ***The Role of the Diaspora in Providing Alternative Education***

The Indonesian diaspora in Malaysia plays a significant role in providing alternative education for immigrant children, particularly those without access to the formal education system. This role is realised through the establishment of community schools and non-formal learning centres managed independently by the diaspora community. These community schools are generally located in areas with high concentrations of Indonesian migrant workers, such as plantation areas and worker settlements in Sabah and Selangor. The existence of these community-based educational institutions is a direct response to the limitations of host countries' education policies, which have not fully accommodated the educational rights of immigrant children.

Diaspora community schools provide basic education services that cover literacy, numeracy, citizenship, and character education. The implemented curriculum is adaptive and contextual, tailored to students' social, cultural, and migrant backgrounds. This curriculum approach focuses not only on basic academic achievement but also on the formation of identity, national values, and social preparedness of immigrant children living in vulnerable situations. These findings align with research by Wulan et al. (2024), which shows that diaspora community-based education functions as a social protection mechanism and a means of strengthening the basic capacities of children of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia (Wulan et al., 2024).

From a public policy perspective, the diaspora's role in providing alternative education signals a shift in the policy-making role from the state to non-state actors. The diaspora not only implements social activities but also, informally, implements policies under conditions of limited state capacity. This phenomenon demonstrates the diaspora's role as a substitute policy actor, stepping in to fulfil citizens' basic rights when existing public policies fail to reach vulnerable groups effectively.

Furthermore, the existence of diaspora community schools reflects a bottom-up form of community-based policy innovation. This initiative demonstrates how diaspora social capital, in the form of community networks, solidarity, and collective commitment, can be mobilised to provide alternative public services. However, while effective in expanding educational access, the diaspora's role as a substitute policy actor also indicates a structural failure on the part of the state to guarantee the sustainable exercise of educational rights by immigrant children. Without formal recognition and integration into the public policy framework, alternative education provided by the diaspora is potentially temporary and vulnerable to resource constraints.

Thus, the role of the diaspora in providing alternative education is not only relevant to understand as a social practice of migrant communities, but also as a public policy issue that demands state attention. Strengthening collaboration among the Indonesian government, the Malaysian government, and the Indonesian diaspora is crucial to recognising, strengthening, and integrating community-based education initiatives into strategies for developing human resources for immigrant children in a more sustainable manner.

### ***Diaspora as a Non-State Public Policy Actor***

From a public policy perspective, the diaspora can be categorised as a non-state actor that performs policy implementation functions informally, particularly in contexts of limited state capacity and reach. Gamlen (2014) refers to this phenomenon as diaspora governance from below, a form of governance that emerges from diaspora community initiatives in response to social issues that have not been fully addressed by the state (A Gamlen, 2014). In the context of the education of Indonesian immigrant children in Malaysia, the diaspora plays a role not only as a recipient of the impacts of migration policy but also as an active actor filling policy gaps by providing alternative education services.

The existence of the diaspora as a non-state policy actor indicates a shift in policy implementation from a state-centric to a collaborative, community-based approach. While Malaysia's national education policy faces limitations in reaching undocumented immigrant children, and the policy on the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad has not been fully integrated with the education sector, the diaspora emerges as an actor connecting community needs with policy practices on the ground. This role emphasises that the diaspora not only operates in the social and cultural spheres but also performs de facto public policy functions.

Conceptually, the role of the diaspora in educational policy for immigrant children can be illustrated through a policy flow model that demonstrates the causal relationship between state policy limitations and the emergence of diaspora community initiatives. This model begins with the limited state policy in accommodating the educational rights of immigrant children, whether due to regulatory factors, citizenship status, or administrative considerations. These limitations then create a policy gap that directly impacts the marginalisation of immigrant children from the formal education system. In this situation, the Indonesian diaspora serves as a substitute policy actor, addressing the policy gap by providing community-based alternative education. This alternative education subsequently contributes to strengthening the basic capacity and quality of human resources for immigrant children, despite remaining within structural limitations.

**Figure 1.** Diaspora Role Models in Immigrant Children's Education Policy



The model presented in Figure 1 illustrates a causal policy flow that begins with the limitations of state education policies in accommodating immigrant children. These limitations often arise from regulatory frameworks, citizenship requirements, and administrative considerations that prioritize nationals over non-citizens. As a consequence, immigrant children, especially those without legal documentation, are excluded from formal education systems. This condition reflects a structural issue in public policy where the state has not fully ensured equal access to education, resulting in unequal opportunities for vulnerable groups.

These limitations create what is referred to as a policy gap, which shows the disconnect between the universal principle of the right to education and its implementation in practice. The policy gap is not only a technical problem but also a systemic issue rooted in governance arrangements that are not fully inclusive. As a result, immigrant children experience marginalization, limited educational access, and a higher risk of long-term social and economic disadvantage. This situation highlights the need for alternative approaches that can respond more effectively to the needs of these communities.

In response to this gap, the Indonesian diaspora emerges as a substitute policy actor that plays an important intermediary role. Operating outside formal state structures, diaspora communities establish community-based education initiatives to provide learning opportunities for immigrant children. These efforts reflect adaptive and collaborative forms of governance, where non-state actors utilize social networks, cultural proximity, and contextual understanding to deliver services. However, these initiatives often face challenges such as limited resources, lack of formal recognition, and uneven quality of service delivery.

The final stage of the model shows that community-based alternative education contributes to strengthening the basic capacities and overall quality of human resources among immigrant children. Although these initiatives cannot fully replace formal education systems, they provide essential learning foundations and continuity. From a public policy perspective, this indicates the importance of integrating diaspora initiatives into a broader governance framework. Strengthening collaboration between state and non-state actors can support more inclusive education systems and improve long-term human resource development outcomes.

### ***Sustainability Challenges and Policy Integration***

Although the Indonesian diaspora's role in providing alternative education for immigrant children in Malaysia has made significant contributions, this initiative still faces various structural challenges that affect its sustainability and effectiveness. These challenges are not only technical but also reflect the weak policy integration between countries of origin and destination countries in guaranteeing the educational rights of migrant groups.

First, the lack of formal state recognition is a major obstacle to the development of diaspora-based education. Most community schools and learning centres run by the Indonesian diaspora operate outside the formal education system in both Indonesia and Malaysia. This situation undermines the institutions' legal standing and their access to state resources, including technical assistance and funding. From a public policy perspective, this lack of formal recognition indicates a policy gap between the normative mandate to protect children's rights and policy implementation on the ground, particularly for immigrant children who face a vulnerable legal status.

Second, the heavy reliance on donations and volunteers makes diaspora education institutionally fragile. Funding for community schools' operations generally comes from donations from individuals, community organisations, or philanthropic institutions, which are not permanent. Furthermore, the teaching staff is largely comprised of diaspora volunteers with limited time and professional capacity. This situation has implications for the fluctuating quality of educational services and the program's long-term sustainability. The OECD (2015) asserts that non-state education initiatives not integrated into public policy frameworks tend to be temporary and difficult to replicate systemically (OECD, 2015).

Third, the lack of bilateral policy coordination between Indonesia and Malaysia exacerbates the fragmentation of the governance of immigrant children's education. To date, the issue of educating the children of migrant workers and immigrants is still largely viewed as a social issue rather than a cross-border public policy issue. Consequently, there is no clear policy mechanism to synergise the roles of the state, diplomatic missions, and diaspora communities in providing education. However, within a multi-level governance framework, the success of public policy is crucially determined by collaboration between actors across sectors and jurisdictions.

Without more institutionalised policy support, the role of the diaspora risks being trapped in a pattern of makeshift, unsustainable policy substitution. The state tends to rely implicitly on community initiatives to fill gaps in public services, without systematic efforts to strengthen the capacity, legitimacy, and sustainability of these non-state actors. This situation not only limits the long-term impact of diaspora education on the development of human resources among immigrant children but also has the potential to reproduce inequalities in educational access across social groups.

Therefore, these challenges to policy sustainability and integration underscore the urgency of reformulating public policies that are more inclusive of the diaspora's role. A policy framework is needed that recognises the diaspora as a strategic partner for the state in fulfilling the educational rights of immigrant children, through strengthened regulations, sustainable funding schemes, and more adaptive bilateral coordination mechanisms. Thus, diaspora-based alternative education will not only serve as a temporary solution but can develop into an integral part of the transnational human resource development policy system.

### ***Implications for Human Resource Development and Public Policy***

The education of Indonesian immigrant children in Malaysia has strategic implications that extend beyond social and humanitarian aspects, as it is directly linked to the cross-border human resource (HR) development agenda. In the context of globalization and international labour

mobility, the quality of human resources is no longer solely determined by national territorial boundaries, but rather by states' and non-state actors' ability to guarantee basic individual rights, including the right to education, across various migration contexts. Therefore, the education of immigrant children should be positioned as an integral part of long-term HR development strategies for both countries of origin and destination.

From the perspective of human capital theory, education is a fundamental investment that determines an individual's future productivity, social mobility, and competitiveness (Ahdan et al., 2024; Baharuddin et al., 2023; Baharuddin & Purwaningsih, 2017; Bamberger, 2022; Rahim et al., 2021; Widayat et al., 2022). Immigrant children who are marginalized from the formal education system are at risk of becoming a lost generation, which ultimately has negative impacts not only on the individual and their family, but also on their country of origin upon their return, as well as the destination country where they grow up and interact socio-economically (Cavallo & Russo, 2025; Kodoth et al., 2025). Thus, neglecting the education of immigrant children actually creates long-term social and economic costs that far outweigh the investment in inclusive education policies.

In this context, the Indonesian diaspora holds a strategic position as a policy bridge between the state and immigrant communities. The diaspora not only understands the socio-cultural context of immigrant children but also shares a normative affinity with Indonesian national values and human resource development interests (Cahyanto et al., 2023; Harijanti et al., 2018; Indraswari & Aryani, 2019). The diaspora's role in providing alternative education demonstrates significant potential to develop a collaborative public policy model in which the state is no longer the sole actor but instead serves as a facilitator, regulator, and capacity enhancer for non-state actors. This approach aligns with the paradigms of collaborative governance and network governance in contemporary public policy.

Furthermore, integrating the diaspora's role into public policy also has normative implications for the fulfilment of human rights principles. UNESCO affirms that education is a universal right that should not be limited by citizenship or migration status. Therefore, education policies that neglect immigrant children contradict the principles of social justice and inclusivity. Within this framework, the diaspora can function as a norm entrepreneur, encouraging the internalisation of human rights values into policy practices at the local, national, and transnational levels.

Another policy implication is the need to reorient policies for the protection of Indonesian citizens abroad, which previously emphasised employment and legal protection. However, it has not systematically integrated the education of migrant children into the national human resource development agenda. The education of immigrant children should not be viewed as a policy burden, but rather as a strategic investment to maintain the quality of Indonesia's human resources in the future. In this regard, synergy between relevant ministries, diplomatic missions, the migrants' local governments of origin, and the diaspora community is a crucial prerequisite for effective and sustainable policies. Thus, the implications for human resource development and public policy emphasise the need to institutionalise the diaspora within a more inclusive, equitable, and human rights-oriented policy framework. Strengthening regulations, funding support, and cross-border coordination mechanisms will enable the education of immigrant children not only to remain a community initiative but also to evolve into part of a comprehensive and sustainable human development strategy.

## **CONCLUSION**

The main findings of this study reveal that Indonesian immigrant children in Malaysia face multidimensional barriers to accessing formal education, primarily due to the lack of legal documentation, the precarious legal status of their parents, structural poverty, and linguistic and cultural challenges, all of which contribute to their systematic exclusion from the education system. In this context, the Indonesian diaspora plays a significant role as a non-state actor by filling the existing policy gap through the provision of community-based alternative education, advocacy for educational rights, and the strengthening of children's basic capacities. However, these contributions remain limited and vulnerable due to the absence of formal recognition, sustainable funding, and effective bilateral policy coordination. Therefore, this study underscores

the importance of integrating diaspora initiatives into a more inclusive and collaborative public policy framework to ensure sustainable access to education and to support the long-term development of human capital among immigrant children.

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