

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ARTICLE

Capacity Building for Migrant Worker Parents in Parenting Skills at the Gombak Utara Community Learning Centre, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

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Abstract

Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia encounter ongoing obstacles in securing formal education for their children. These barriers stem primarily from unresolved citizenship status and insufficient documentation. While Community Learning Centers (CLCs) offer basic education for children aged eight and above, early childhood development support remains inadequate. Limited parental knowledge and mothers' demanding work schedules further compound these challenges. This community service program aims to strengthen parenting skills among migrant worker parents, empowering them to better support their children's development. The initiative encompasses structured parenting workshops and play-based learning sessions designed to enhance parent-child interactions while fostering children's self-confidence and learning motivation. The program's primary beneficiaries are migrant worker parents and their children enrolled at the Gombak Utara Community Learning Center in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The intervention employs the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach, emphasizing active community participation and collaborative problem-solving. Findings demonstrate enhanced maternal understanding of quality parenting practices through nurturing interactions, play activities, supportive home learning environments, appropriate parenting approaches, and Islamic values integration. Participants exhibited notable shifts in parenting attitudes, evidenced by heightened awareness in evaluating their previously employed parenting methods.

Keywords

Capacity Building; Migrant Worker; Parenting Skills.

Abstrak

Pekerja migran Indonesia di Malaysia menghadapi hambatan berkelanjutan dalam mengakses pendidikan formal bagi anak-anak mereka. Hambatan utama bersumber dari status kewarganegaraan yang belum terselesaikan dan dokumentasi yang tidak memadai. Meskipun Pusat Pembelajaran Komunitas (Community Learning Centers/CLCs) menyediakan pendidikan dasar untuk anak berusia delapan tahun ke atas, dukungan perkembangan anak usia dini masih belum memadai. Keterbatasan pengetahuan orang tua dan jadwal kerja ibu yang padat semakin memperburuk tantangan tersebut. Program pengabdian masyarakat bertujuan memperkuat keterampilan pengasuhan di kalangan orang tua pekerja migran, memberdayakan mereka untuk lebih baik mendukung perkembangan anak. Inisiatif mencakup lokakarya pengasuhan terstruktur dan sesi pembelajaran berbasis permainan yang dirancang untuk meningkatkan interaksi orang tua-anak sambil menumbuhkan kepercayaan diri dan motivasi belajar anak. Penerima manfaat utama program adalah orang tua pekerja migran dan anak-anak mereka yang terdaftar di Pusat Pembelajaran Komunitas Gombak Utara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Intervensi menggunakan pendekatan Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) yang menekankan partisipasi aktif komunitas dan pemecahan masalah kolaboratif. Temuan menunjukkan peningkatan pemahaman ibu tentang praktik pengasuhan berkualitas melalui interaksi yang penuh kasih, aktivitas bermain, lingkungan belajar rumah yang mendukung, pendekatan pengasuhan yang tepat, dan integrasi nilai-nilai Islam. Peserta menunjukkan perubahan sikap pengasuhan yang signifikan, terbukti dari meningkatnya kesadaran dalam mengevaluasi metode pengasuhan yang sebelumnya mereka gunakan.

Kata Kunci

Pengembangan Kapasitas; Pekerja Migran; Keterampilan Pengasuhan.

1 | INTRODUCTION

Early childhood (0-8 years) represents a critical period that serves as the foundation for all aspects of child development, encompassing physical growth, gross and fine motor skills, intellectual intelligence, language, spiritual and religious development, social, emotional, moral, artistic, and creative capacities. Numerous studies indicate that approximately 80% of human brain capacity develops during this period (Shonkoff, 2022). Consequently, appropriate stimulation can significantly impact cognitive and academic abilities (Walker *et al.*, 2022), socio-emotional development (Nketia *et al.*, 2021), mental and physical health (Black *et al.*, 2017), gross and fine motor skills (Ruiz-Garcia *et al.*, 2024), language acquisition (Zhang *et al.*, 2018), spiritual-religious development (Hambali *et al.*, 2022), moral development (Rigo *et al.*, 2023), as well as artistic and creative expression. Conversely, inadequate stimulation during this critical period may result in developmental potential losses that are difficult to rectify later in life. The first and most important stimulation that children receive comes from their mothers and fathers, followed by support from close family members or caregivers, and educators in early childhood programs for children enrolled in such programs. However, evidence suggests that not all young children are fortunate enough to have parents who understand their children's developmental needs in all areas from an early age.

Indonesia is the country with the largest number of migrant workers in Malaysia in 2022, with a record number of 2.7 million workers, of which only 1.6 million are officially registered under the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) (Peters *et al.*, 2022). The large number of migrant workers creates complex problems, one of which is education for the children of migrant workers in terms of access to education. Many children of migrant workers do not have access to formal education due to unclear citizenship status or incomplete documentation (Rianti *et al.*, 2024; Subiyantoro & Prabowo, 2017). To address these issues, the Indonesian government, in cooperation with the Malaysian government and non-governmental organizations, established Community Learning Centers (CLCs). The CLC serves as an educational facility for the children of Indonesian migrant workers. These CLCs were established to fulfill the educational rights of children who are often neglected due to their parents' migration status. However, the number of CLCs remains limited, with 500 CLCs throughout Malaysia managed by migrant workers and the Indonesian Embassy in Malaysia.

Current capacity remains insufficient to provide access to education for all children of Indonesian migrant workers (Yulianto *et al.*, 2023; Yuvanti, 2021). Specifically, the PKM team, under the guidance of the Indonesian Embassy, conducted a visit to the Gombak Utara Community Learning Center (CLC) to observe conditions firsthand. The findings revealed two major challenges facing the children there. First, the mental well-being of these children is at risk due to persistent stigma and discrimination, which can negatively affect their psychological development (Loganathan *et al.*, 2021). This situation inevitably hinders the children's overall growth and self-confidence. During the visit, it was observed that children between the ages of 6 and 12 exhibited low self-esteem, as evidenced by their reluctance to express opinions or show curiosity when interacting with the Community Service (CS) team.

The second issue relates to an unsupportive social and family environment. According to the owner of the local CLC, the institution operates entirely on a self-funded basis, with no fees charged to parents. However, this policy has inadvertently led to a lack of parental responsibility for their children's education. As a result, there is minimal parental involvement, whether in the form of financial contributions or in-kind support, to sustain the operations of the CLC. It is expected that fostering a sense of responsibility among parents could improve the functionality of the CLC learning system and ensure more effective funding mechanisms that would positively impact the educational outcomes of migrant workers' children (Suarno *et al.*, 2021). In addition, to strengthen the purpose of this implementation, we have officially corresponded with the Malaysian Embassy to discuss the problems faced by the children of migrant workers in Malaysia and the solutions we offer. We also expressed our hope for material or non-material support from the Malaysian Embassy.



Figure 1. Community Learning Center Gombak Utara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia

To overcome the problems faced by parents and children at CLC Gombak Utara, the CS Unisba team collaborated with the CLC through Capacity Building for Migrant Worker Parents in Parenting at Community Learning Center Gombak Utara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. CS Overseas Collaboration supports the transformation of higher education, especially the Main Performance Index (IKU) 2 students get off-campus experience; IKU 3 lecturers conduct off-campus activities; and IKU 5 the results of lecturers' work are utilized by the community, because the Capacity Building for Migrant Worker Parents in Parenting activity is a research output and expertise from the Unisba PKM team. This overseas cooperation PKM activity aligns with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) program, specifically SDG 4: Quality Education, which ensures the right of every Indonesian citizen abroad to receive quality education, and SDG 10: Reduced Inequalities, which guarantees every Indonesian citizen equality in educational opportunities. Quality education for children from an Islamic perspective is highly emphasized, with Islamic values emphasizing character building, spirituality, and morality. This education aims to shape children into individuals of faith, piety, and noble character. Education is both a right and a duty for every Muslim. Good education must be based on Islamic *Aqidah* and begins with the family, with parents as the primary educators, followed by schools and a supportive society (Ubaidillah *et al.*, 2024). In addition, parents have an important role in educating their children as the primary role models and guides. Education within the family must reflect Islamic values and prepare children to face the challenges of the times (Islahuddin *et al.*, 2021). Therefore, this PKM activity targets the parents of migrant workers. Furthermore, the community and the state also have a responsibility to ensure that children's educational rights are fulfilled. Education that is child-friendly and based on Islamic values can be a manifestation of the social responsibility of society (Firman Mansir, 2022).

2 | METHOD

This community service activity uses the Participatory Rural Appraisal (PRA) approach. PRA is a participatory method that involves the community in jointly analyzing life problems, formulating plans, and implementing real, concrete actions (Chambers, 1996). The PRA method adheres to key principles such as mutual learning, active group participation, facilitation by external supporters, triangulation for validation, optimization of results, and sustainability of programs. The CS team approached various stakeholders, including the head of the Gombak Utara Community Learning Center (CLC) in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The goal was to gather comprehensive information about the CLC's potential, opportunities, constraints, and challenges. These discussions served as the basis for designing activities that directly address the problems faced by migrant parents and children. The stages of community service implementation (Rochdyanto, 2002) are shown in Table 1 below.

Table 1. The stages of community service

Stage	Main Activities	Output	Implementers
1) Identification and Socialization of the Service Program	Activities in this stage included: a) Conducting interviews and focus group discussions with CLC representatives, parents b) Identifying priority problems to ensure alignment with partner needs c) Socializing the objectives and expected outcomes of the program to all stakeholders, including the Malaysian Embassy, to secure permissions and support	a) Identification and formulation of key challenges in educating and caring for children of migrant workers in Gombak Utara, considering their socio-cultural and economic contexts b) Development of a structured activity plan addressing these challenges while aligning with the specific needs of the target population c) Systematic communication of the program's objectives and expected outcomes to stakeholders, including the Community Learning Centre (CLC), parents, and the Education Attaché of the Indonesian Embassy in Malaysia, to secure formal approval and institutional support for implementation	a) Unisba CS Team CLC Representative Education Attaché of the Indonesian Embassy in Malaysia

2) Program Planning	Preparation of the Service Plan includes: a) Develop customized parenting materials for migrant parents b) Prepare administrative documents for smooth execution c) Design pre- and post-assessment instruments to measure changes in parents' understanding of effective parenting d) Allocate resources, including facilitators, materials, and logistical needs e) Develop methods for evaluating the impact of the parenting sessions f) Socialization: The CS team engaged collaboration partners, including the Malaysian Embassy and local stakeholders, to raise awareness of the program	a) Determination of speakers and formulation of materials b) Cooperation documents are available c) Pre- and post-test questions are available d) Media and equipment are available e) Evaluation methods are determined f) The activity was approved by the Malaysian Embassy and local stakeholders	a) Unisba Community Service Team (CS) b) Faculty Cooperation Division 3-6. Unisba CS Team
3) Program Implementation	a) Session 1: The Importance of Early Parent-Child Interactions b) Session 2: Parental Cognitive Engagement c) Session 3: Stimulating Child Development Through Play Activities d) Session 4: The Role of the Home Learning Environment e) Session 5: Influences of Parenting on Child Development f) Session 6: Parenting Quality in an Islamic Perspective	a) Participants understand the urgency of direct parental interaction and its impact on child development b) Participants can provide examples of cognitive parental involvement c) Participants can recognize various games that can be played with children d) Participants are able to describe a home environment that is conducive to children's learning e) Participants know the differences in parenting patterns and their impact on child development and conduct self-evaluations of the parenting patterns that have been applied to children f) Understand the parenting approach in Islam and be able to put forward examples of Islamic parenting applications	Unisba CS Team
4) Reporting and Analysis	The CS team documented all activities and analyzed their outcomes to assess the program's effectiveness	Pre- and post-tests were conducted to measure: a) Parents' understanding and application of parenting concepts b) Children's ability to comprehend, design, and practice developmental games	Unisba CS Team

5) Evaluation and Continuation	An evaluation meeting was conducted with parents, stakeholders, and CLC representatives to discuss the results and identify areas for improvement. To ensure sustainability, future sessions for parents were planned through online platforms, such as Zoom, to reinforce and expand their parenting knowledge. Partner contributions to the program included:	a) Facilitating communication between the service team and stakeholders b) Preparing participants, including parents and children, for the program c) Providing facilities and infrastructure necessary for program activities	Unisba CS Team
6) Evaluation and Program Sustainability.	Evaluation focused on assessing the program's effectiveness in addressing identified problems. Key performance indicators (KPIs) included:	a) Improved parental understanding of effective parenting techniques, as measured by pre- and post-test results b) Increased child engagement and development, as observed during play activities c) Continued collaboration with CLCs and local stakeholders to expand the program's reach	Unisba CS Team

3 | RESULT AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Results

The Community Service Program (CSP) was designed to strengthen the parenting skills of immigrant parents, particularly in supporting their children's development abroad. The first day of the program consisted of five interactive sessions that combined theory and practical activities to ensure immediate application. The opening session, "The Importance of Early Parent-Child Interaction," emphasized how early engagement can foster a child's emotional, cognitive, and social growth. Participants discussed simple everyday practices and reflected on real-life experiences to foster a strong foundation for early bonding. Next, "Parent Cognitive Engagement" introduced strategies for fostering children's critical thinking through exploration and inquiry. Participants practiced stimulating children's curiosity through engaging questions and activities in an interactive workshop. In the third session, "Parenting Quality from an Islamic Perspective," parents examined key qualities such as responsiveness, warmth, and consistency, while reflecting on Islamic values that shape nurturing parenting practices. Role-playing exercises allowed them to experience and internalize these principles actively. The fourth session, "The Role of the Home Learning Environment," offered practical guidance on organizing supportive learning spaces at home, even with limited resources. Visual demonstrations helped participants imagine creative and effective arrangements that promote children's autonomy and motivation. Finally, "Influences of Parenting on Child Development" highlighted the long-term impact of parenting styles. Participants reflected on their parenting approaches, discussed challenges, and shared strategies for improvement, strengthening their willingness to support their children's holistic growth. Figure 2 below illustrates the implementation of community service at the CLC Gombak Utara in Malaysia. In the picture, several presenters are providing training sessions for Indonesian migrant parents in Malaysia.



Figure 2. The Unisba Community Service Implementation Team gave a presentation at the CLC.

This study aims to measure changes in the understanding of migrant workers' parents after they participated in a training program in Gombak Utara, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. A pre-test and post-test were administered to a sample of 11 parents to measure change. As part of the initial analysis, the research team examined both the educational and occupational backgrounds of the participants. Understanding these backgrounds was essential to contextualizing the participants' socioeconomic positions and their potential impact on parenting practices in a migrant setting. By analyzing the level of education and type of employment of the respondents, the research team aimed to gain a more comprehensive overview of the factors influencing their parenting approaches. Figure 3 below shows the occupational background of the participants in this study. By illustrating the occupational distribution of the participants, this chart provides a clearer understanding of the economic activities and roles that characterize the migrant parent communities studied.

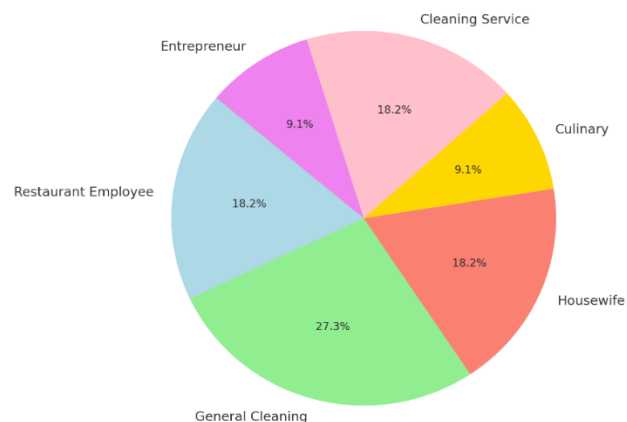


Figure 3. Occupational Background of Immigrant Parents

Based on the data collected from 11 respondents, the occupational composition of the participants in this study is as follows: The data are categorized into six occupational groups based on the occupations reported by the respondents: General Cleaner, Restaurant Worker, Homemaker, Cleaning Service Worker, Entrepreneur, and Culinary Worker. The results showed that the largest occupational group was General Cleaners, which represented 27.3% of the participants. This category includes individuals engaged in manual cleaning activities in various informal or semi-formal settings. This percentage reflects the consolidation of the job titles "Cleaning Service" and "General Cleaning" into a single category based on functional similarities in the workplace. Three occupational groups—restaurant worker, homemaker, and cleaning service—each account for 18.2 percent of the total sample. While Restaurant Employee refers to workers in food service establishments, Homemaker refers to participants who are full-time homemakers without formal employment. Notably, Cleaning Service remains distinct from General Cleaning, which refers to participants who are formally employed by cleaning service companies or agencies with structured employment contracts, as opposed to informal or freelance cleaners. The remaining occupational groups, Entrepreneur and Culinary, each account for 9.1% of the sample. The Entrepreneur category includes self-employed individuals or small business owners, while Culinary refers to participants whose primary occupation is food preparation, either in commercial kitchens or in catering services. The educational background of the 11 respondents revealed a predominance of lower to middle levels of formal education. Figure 4 shows that most of the participants had completed junior high school, which was the largest group in the sample. The other small

proportion were graduates of various levels but above senior high school.

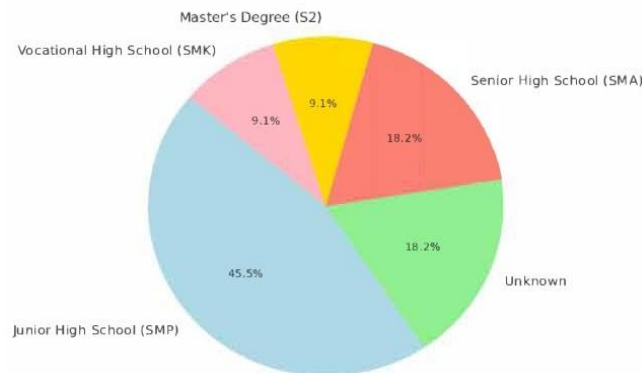


Figure 4. Educational Background of Migrant Workers' Parents

The educational background of the 11 respondents revealed a predominance of lower to middle levels of formal education. Based on the data generated, most participants had completed Junior High School (SMP), which was the largest group within the sample. A smaller number of participants reported having completed Senior High School (SMA) or Vocational High School (SMK), reflecting a slightly higher level of formal education, but still within the secondary education range. In addition, one respondent completed a master's degree (S2), representing the highest level of education among the participants. This suggests that while most of the group had limited formal education, there was a small presence of higher academic achievement. However, there were also respondents with unknown educational backgrounds recorded as 'unknown', possibly due to incomplete data reporting or informal educational pathways. The program's effectiveness was determined by conducting a statistical test. This test determined whether there was a significant difference in results before and after training. Additionally, the effect size was calculated using Cohen's *d* to evaluate the magnitude of the training's impact. To evaluate participants' understanding of the training materials, the research team developed 12 pretest and posttest questions. These questions reflect the key concepts and skills covered in the program's six sessions. The assessments aimed to measure participants' baseline knowledge before the intervention and their learning outcomes after the training activities.

Table 2. Pre-Post Test Results

No	Name	Pre-Test Score	Post-Test Score	Difference Score
1	MA	11	12	1
2	Kh	3	6	3
3	Nu	11	12	1
4	Kha	11	12	1
5	MR	8	12	4
6	Maw	2	10	8
7	SW	9	10	1
8	Has	7	10	3
9	SR	8	11	3
10	Ch	9	12	3
11	BWJ	9	12	3
Average				2.82

The results of the data processing above are presented in the following descriptive statistical data: the mean score difference between the post-test and pre-test scores was 2.82, indicating an increase in parents' understanding after the training. Furthermore, the standard deviation of 2.04 reflects variation in the level of score change among respondents, suggesting that some participants experienced significant improvement while others experienced smaller changes. The paired t-test yielded a result of 4.58 and a p-value of 0.0010. Since the p-value is less than the commonly used significance level of 0.05, it can be concluded that the change between the pre-test and post-test is statistically significant. To calculate the effect of training on changes in scores, the data were processed using effect sizes, such as Cohen's *d*, which measures the magnitude of the difference between two groups or conditions (in this case, pre-test and post-test) and indicates how significant the difference is. The results of the calculation show a value of 1.12. This value falls into the "large" category, meaning the training significantly and substantially increased the understanding of migrant worker parents. Generally, Cohen's *d* values can be interpreted as follows: (0.2 = small effect; 0.5 = medium effect; 0.8 = large effect). A Cohen's *d*

value of 1.12 shows that the training had a significant impact on the changes in pre- and post-test scores. Based on the results of the paired t-test and Cohen's d, it can be concluded that the training provided to migrant worker parents in Gombak Utara significantly and substantially impacted their understanding of the importance of parenting, its influence on child development, and the quality of the learning environment at home. The significant increase in scores indicates that parents successfully understood and implemented the material taught during the training.

3.2 Discussion

The substantial effect size demonstrated through Cohen's d analysis indicates that this capacity-building intervention successfully enhanced parenting competencies and transformed parental perspectives regarding early childhood engagement, cognitive involvement, and caregiving quality. These outcomes suggest considerable potential for broader implementation of such interventions to elevate care standards for migrant worker families. The results highlight the critical necessity for targeted capacity-building programs that address the authentic experiences of migrant worker parents. Through comprehensive examination of participants' occupational contexts, the Gombak Utara Community Learning Center program developed culturally responsive and contextually relevant parenting modules that acknowledged participants' temporal constraints, work-related pressures, and social marginalization. Furthermore, occupational data established an evidence-based foundation for advocating structural support mechanisms, including flexible scheduling arrangements, childcare provisions, and employer partnerships to facilitate program participation. These comprehensive approaches align with broader objectives of enhancing family welfare, advancing child development, and strengthening community resilience among vulnerable migrant populations in Kuala Lumpur. The occupational profiles of participants extend beyond mere demographic description to encompass significant implications for designing, implementing, and sustaining capacity-building initiatives for migrant worker parents. Sophisticated understanding of employment contexts enables more effective and equitable intervention strategies that address their dual challenges as both laborers and caregivers.

Comprehending participants' educational characteristics proves essential for customizing parenting education programs to match literacy capabilities and ensuring training materials remain accessible and effective for target populations. When materials and methodologies align with participants' educational backgrounds and literacy levels, individuals demonstrate increased comfort and confidence in applying acquired knowledge (Muscat *et al.*, 2020). Program customization based on literacy levels enhances relevance and acceptance while amplifying impact on family systems. Such programs consistently demonstrate improved knowledge retention and enhanced parenting practices (Fikrat-Wevers *et al.*, 2021). Additionally, well-designed family literacy programs promote positive changes in home literacy behaviors and activities, including increased parental engagement in children's educational development (de la Rie *et al.*, 2017; Swain & Cara, 2019). Migrant parents encounter distinctive challenges in maintaining secure attachment relationships and implementing positive parenting strategies amid separation or environmental adaptation. Effective practices for migrant parents encompass sustaining transnational connections, participating in culturally responsive support initiatives, and cultivating resilience through open communication with children. Active involvement of migrant parents in developing culturally appropriate support programs enhances engagement and addresses specific needs, promoting positive parenting approaches and health literacy (Mangrio *et al.*, 2022). Structured parent education interventions, exemplified by pilot programs with migrant mothers in China, have demonstrated improvements in parent-child relationships and parenting practices, even when parental identity remains relatively stable (To *et al.*, 2019).

Migrant children, particularly unaccompanied minors, face elevated risks of exploitation, trauma, social isolation, and barriers to accessing essential services including education and healthcare (Gimeno-Monterde & Gutiérrez-Sánchez, 2019). Child vulnerability intensifies due to variations in institutional responses and policy frameworks across different countries (Battersby *et al.*, 2018). Primary integration challenges include linguistic barriers, cultural disparities, and insufficient social support systems (Arzubiaga *et al.*, 2009; Tobin, 2020). Knowledge transfer of effective practices across national boundaries remains crucial for reducing vulnerability and enhancing protection mechanisms. The harmonization of migrant child protection legislation across European contexts exemplifies this approach (Neubauer, 2022). Research demonstrates that collaborative partnerships among educational institutions, governmental agencies, and local communities, including meaningful participation of migrant children in policy development, strengthens integration outcomes (Pečenković & Delić, 2023). Studies emphasize the fundamental importance of incorporating migrant children's and families' perspectives in program development (Neubauer, 2022). Migrant parents can effectively maintain attachment relationships and implement positive parenting through sustained connections with children, engagement in culturally sensitive support programs, and adaptive family role modifications within new environments. These strategies foster resilience, support children's well-being, and preserve strong family connections despite migration-related challenges.

The implications of this community service program encompass several key considerations: programs must deliver comprehensible, contextually relevant materials; facilitator preparation and resource adaptation remain essential for engaging participants across diverse literacy levels (Muscat *et al.*, 2020); and incorporating participants in program design and evaluation processes enhances effectiveness and sustainability (Kumar, 2016). Programs require materials that

remain accessible and applicable to participants' daily experiences. Comprehensive facilitator training and resource modification prove vital for programs serving participants with varying educational backgrounds (Muscat *et al.*, 2020). Meaningful participant involvement in program development and assessment processes strengthens both program effectiveness and long-term sustainability (Kumar, 2016). The program's dynamic, participatory methodology ensured that parents acquired theoretical understanding while developing practical competencies to strengthen family systems within diverse and challenging circumstances.

4 | CONCLUSIONS

The conclusions that were reached by the CSP program on capacity building for migrant worker parents in parenting skills are as follows: parenting approaches were reflected upon by the participants, challenges were discussed, and strategies for improvement were shared, thereby reinforcing the desire to support the holistic growth of their children. The program's dynamic, participatory approach ensured that parents absorbed theoretical knowledge and developed practical skills to strengthen their families in a diverse and challenging environment.

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