

## The Opportunities for Open and Distance Education in the Enhancement of Migrant Labour Skills and Competencies in ASEAN: The Case of Thailand

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**ARTICLE INFO:** Received: 13 Nov 2020; Revised: 5 Mar 2021;  
Accepted: 07 June 2021; Available Online: 14 June 2021

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### Abstract

*Following previous studies on labour migration and competency policy and measures in Thailand, this study attempts to examine how they have been implemented and how open and distance education can play a role in upgrading the competency of migrant workers. This study is a qualitative research aiming to examine: 1) the implementations of labour migration and competency policy and measures in Thailand; and 2) the role of open and distance education for developing migrant labour skills and capabilities. This research uses primary data collected through interviews from 17 key informants in public and private agencies, universities, other relevant organisations and representatives of foreign labour in Thailand, and secondary data derived from documents and other available sources. Content analysis of the data corresponding to the research objectives is employed. The study yielded the following findings. First, the implementations of immigration labour policy and measures of Thailand covered building on memoranda of understanding with neighbouring labour-sending countries, as well as rights and protections based on the relevant law and skill training. Some problems of the implementation of competency policy were observed concerning focused training groups, enforcement, and cooperation at the policy level. The execution of emigration labour policy and measures comprised cooperation between Thai public agencies and those in Thai worker destination countries. The operation of competency policy and measures contained the training of rights and legal protection in destination countries for Thai workers, the collaboration between Thai and those countries' governments in the preparation for Thai workers before travelling, the preparation of Thai workers entering the ASEAN community, and the skill development of relevant neighbouring countries' government officials. Second, the utilisation of open and distance education for skill and competency development of migrant labour as pointed out by relevant agencies and migrant workers should encompass: (1) languages for working communication, (2) relevant laws, regulations, benefits, protections, and welfare of both home and host countries, and (3) those related to working skill development. The suggested nature of the programme is highlighted in this study.*

**Keywords:** *Open and Distance Education, Migrant Labour, Skills and Competency, ASEAN*

## Introduction

International labour migration is a very important factor in driving the economies of both home (sending migrants) and host (receiving migrants) countries. Although both countries realise that migrant labour brings about the growth of their economies, so far regarding labour migration, especially within ASEAN countries, each country receives different benefits from this situation. For instance, the host countries (destination of migrant labour) perceive that their contribution can reduce their own local labour shortage problems, whereas the home countries (origin of migrant labour) believe that they can benefit from migrant worker remittances, as well as upgrades in their labour skills. However, in the case of international labour migration, the significant issues are the benefits both countries receive depending on the skills and competencies of the migrant labour. Therefore, home countries should realise that workers who want to work overseas should already have the necessary skills for travelling and working in host countries. On the other hand, host countries need to understand how they can utilise international labour migration in terms of the productivity of immigrant workers. Therefore, the optimal outcome of cross-border labour migration should be based on the benefits of both the home and host countries. However, these consequences are highly dependent on the skills and competencies of the migrant labour. In this case, an open education system may play a critical role in the development of labour capacity, thus leading to higher labour productivity and economic benefits to both countries and also to the workers themselves.

With respect to international labour migration in Thailand, the country both receives and sends migrant workers. Thailand is a major labour importer from the Indochinese region, especially Myanmar, Cambodia, and Lao People's Democratic Republic (PDR), respectively. The cross-border workers include both legal and illegal migrants. In 2019, there were 3,005,376 legal foreign labourers in Thailand, with the majority categorised as unskilled labour. Conversely, the majority of skilled labour workers were from Japan, China, the Philippines, United Kingdom, and the USA, respectively. In 2019, there were 113,801 Thai workers working overseas. The majority of them worked in Taiwan, Malaysia, the Republic of Korea, Singapore, the Middle East, and the European Union, respectively. Most of them were categorised as skilled and semi-skilled labour. However, the number of Thai emigrants has declined since 2014. These migrant Thai workers have contributed to the Thai economy, not only in terms of labour remittances but also with skills and experience gained from working overseas (Ministry of Labour, 2020).

In the Thai economy, international labour migration plays a significant role because the economy is partly driven by migrant workers. Within the country, Thailand has faced the problem of unskilled labour shortages owing to the fact that many Thai workers are unwilling to work in 3D jobs (dirty, dangerous and difficult tasks), and that the country will be an aging society in the near future. Meanwhile, Thailand has encountered high-skilled worker scarcity in many fields, which it needs to import from overseas (Toyama & Suvanvihok, 2018). The study of Toyama and Suvanvihok (2018) which examined international labour migration policies and measures related to Thai labour competency prompted this study to investigate how such policies and measures have been implemented, and more importantly, how an open education system and distance education can play a role in increasing the skills and competency of migrant workers.

Meanwhile Thai workers must also prepare themselves in terms of acquiring related skills needed for working and living in destination countries. Both immigrant (foreign labour in

Thailand) or emigrant (Thai workers) labour must possess skills or competencies to meet employer requirements. This has to be developed before leaving to work abroad, or while working to increase productivity, firm profitability and competitiveness, and, finally, worker income. In these efforts, an open education system and distance education can play a critical role in the development of the migrant labour. Hence, this study focuses on what and how education can be utilised to enhance the skills and competency of foreign migrant workers in Thailand and those of Thai emigrant workers.

## Literature Review

### **Role of HRD and distance education in the development of skills and competency of migrant labour**

Human resource development (HRD) is mainly concerned with developing the competencies of people. Its main objective is to develop newer capabilities in people so as to enable them to tackle both present and future challenges while realising organisational goals. However, there is a difference when HRD is applied to institutional (micro) issues and national (macro) issues. At the macro level, HRD is concerned with the development of the people for the nation's well-being. It takes health capabilities skills an attitudes of people that are more useful to the development of the nation as a whole. At the micro level, it concerns how organisations can develop certain new capabilities for people equip themselves to meet present job challenges and to accept future job requirements (mHRM, 2011, January 19). In any organisation, HRD is the key factor bringing about higher and better productivity as a result of an increase in knowledge, skills and attitude an employer wants in its employees, as well as employees' job satisfaction. HRD can be carried out through formal and informal training (Indeed, 2020).

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the issue of migrant workers in a range of international contexts and the role of HRD to maximise organisational effectiveness through the development of effective training and learning systems (Nachmias et al., 2015). To reap the benefits of migration, governments of host countries need to enable migrants to integrate into the labour market through access to employment opportunities in order to support domestic economies and enterprise development (International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch, 2018). For carrying out HRD of migrant workers, it is necessary to increase migrants' accessibility to education and training in the development of relevant and quality skills, and improve access to employment and decent work. Such a HRD effort can be considered as part of lifelong learning. Lifelong learning could strengthen the education and training service delivery for migrants, both in home and host countries of migrants (International Labour Office, Skills and Employability Branch, 2018).

### **Role of Distance and Lifelong Education in the development of labour skills and competency**

Lifelong learning can be largely achieved through the utilisation of distance education. Distance education is important for lifelong learning as it is associated with several social factors such as population migration, education management based on different population situations, and labour market competition. Also, labour competitiveness in market competition relies on their skills and competency. Workers need to have the ability for holistic and lifelong learning. Furthermore, employed workers should be able to learn whilst working or carrying out their occupations to enhance their capabilities and upgrade their qualifications (e.g. certificates or degrees). Consequently, many education institutions attempt to offer educational programmes based on lifelong learning through distance education systems (Gedviliene & Vaiciuniene, 2016).

For skill development, Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) can be offered via an open and distance learning channel as there are more heterogeneous learners and technological progress. In addition, this kind of education can be more inclusive and accessible to people than other methods, because people can learn from their workplace (Mishra & Bartram, 2002). However, from the perspective of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), TVET programmes must be managed by the various parties concerned, such as public and private agencies, education institutions, non-governmental organisations, learners or trainees, and entrepreneurs (Calder, 2002). TVET utilisation can be examined from the experience of Nigeria, where a workplace training and continuous education centre has been established at an open university to provide technical knowledge and vocational education through an open and long-distance system (Olakulehin, 2015). Another example is in India, where distance education has been employed to increase skill development opportunities for people of different classes, genders, and social backgrounds. Consequently, some disadvantaged groups now have better chances to develop themselves and access the labour market, especially women's groups, through TVET courses linked to job opportunities (Mohapatra & Mahapatra, 2016).

As distance education is necessary for provision of adult education, particularly for those who live in remote areas or have already been employed, it is also beneficial for international migrant workers because it gives more prospective employment opportunities and meets the learning needs of migrant workers (Gedviliene & Vaiciuniene, 2016). In Russia, distance education systems through distance education technology, are also employed in the teaching and assessment of foreign labour workers who have migrated from Central Asia to work in Russia. This can help large numbers of legal migrant workers in this country (Ananchenkova & Kuznetsov, 2016).

Regarding the role of distance and open education system in ASEAN, studies that have been conducted in the Philippines (Amante et al., 2018) and Indonesia (Setiani et al., 2018) also point out that this system and online teaching have been playing a significant role in the development of their respective emigrant labour competencies through both regular programmes and those offered to labour workers, before and after travelling to destination countries. For instance, courses comprised content related to basic skills; language and communication skills used for working, especially English and local languages; related law and benefits of both home and host countries; as well as knowledge of living, tradition, and culture in the host countries. The study in Philippines focused on how the programmes offered can be utilised for working and enhancing students' competencies, as well as the design of course and programme content in meeting student requirements and bringing about more benefits to the learners through distance education. It also included a proposal to offer emigrant workers short courses upon their return to enhance working competency and help them in carrying out their occupations in the country. In the Indonesian case, the study emphasised work utilisation and improvement, as well as living skills needed in specific host countries, which derived from programmes designed for distance education students.

### **Objectives of the study**

International labour migration in the study includes the movement of unskilled and skilled migrant labour, as well as labour in eight career fields according to Mutual Recognition Arrangements or MRA of Thai labour to foreign countries (i.e., engineers, nurses, architects, surveyors, physicians, dentists, accountants, and tourists). Hence, migrant labour comprises foreign labour working in Thailand (immigrants) and Thai labour working overseas (emigrants). Therefore, the objectives of this study are to Investigate the

implementation of competency policy and measures concerning migrant labour was conducted before examining what and how open and distance education can be utilised for upgrading migrant labour competencies. The corresponding research questions are:

- i. How can an open education system contribute to the enhancement of migrant labour skills and competencies?
- ii. What are the fields or course content necessary to meet migrant labour (i.e. immigrant and emigrant workers) demand and are of use to labour workers in conducting their jobs and upgrading their skills and qualifications through open and distance education?

## Research Method

Since the research problems involved various organisations and persons, the qualitative approach was applied to gain in-depth understanding of the complex issues and context-based dynamics in labour migration and HRD using both primary and secondary data. Subsequently, content analysis was employed to analyse the data. The primary data, which was mainly used in the analysis for both research objectives, were collected through an in-depth interview using the purposive sampling method with 17 key informants in 2018, involving executives, representatives, and persons directly responsible for the issues studied in relevant agencies. They comprised those from the government, university and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, and representatives of foreign labour.<sup>1</sup> Six different unstructured interview forms were used for each key informant group, the quality of which was checked by an expert. The contents of the interview included questions regarding the implementation of both labour migration and labour competency policies and relevant measures, and also those concerning the development of labour migrant competency via an open learning education system, including opportunity and possibility, method, and content design for learning. The secondary data collected from Ministry of Labour reports and related research documents, were mainly used in the analysis according to the first research objective. Content analysis based on the research objectives were aimed at (i) examining the implementation of labour migration and competency policy, as well as measures concerning international labour migration in Thailand; and (ii) exploring the implications of providing opportunities to utilise the role of open education via distance programmes for developing migrant labour skills and competencies.

## Findings

### Implementation of labour migration, competency policy, and measures concerning international labour migration in Thailand

#### *Case of immigration*

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of Labour (5 persons): Department of Employment (3 persons) (Foreign Labour Administration Office, Overseas Employment Office), Department of Skill Development (1 person), and Department of Labour Protection and Welfare (1 person); Ministry of Foreign Affairs (1 person) (Department of ASEAN); Ministry of Commerce (1 person) (Department of foreign Trade Negotiation); Ministry of Industry (1 person) (Board of Investment); Professional Associations regarding AEC agreement: Tourist Guide Association (1 person), and Nurse Councils (1 person); Academic persons from Universities (2 persons) (Institute of ASEAN Studies, Chulalongkorn University), (Institute of Population and Social Research, Mahidol University); The Thai Chamber of Commerce (1 person); Labor Right Promotion Network Foundation (LPN) (1 person); Representatives of foreign labour from Myanmar (3 persons).

Efforts for a long-term solution to labour immigration in Thailand have been carried out intensively, especially during the 2015-2018 period, including the signing of memoranda of understanding (MOU) and holding technical cooperation meetings regarding labour migration issues at the ministerial level with neighbouring countries. Thailand has had good cooperation from neighbouring countries that are the main labour senders, i.e. Myanmar, Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Vietnam. The MOU between Thailand and these countries cover various aspects. Rights and protections based on the relevant law and skill training provided for foreign workers are also included in the cooperative agreements.

According to an in-depth interview with some key informants, it was indicated that labour skill development efforts had normally been emphasised on Thai labour. Foreign labour representatives also pointed out that employers were likely to offer training to domestic (i.e. Thai) workers. However, although cooperation between relevant government skill development agencies and local education institutions in the targeted areas was good, they were not good at the policy level. Although there are laws concerning the requirements of human skill development in enterprises, some employers did not follow these regulations. Enterprises with more than 100 employees are required to provide skill development training to their employees, and employers that do so will get corporate income tax exemption for the training expenses, whereas those that do not have to pay a penalty by sending contributions to the Skill Development Fund.

### ***Case of emigration***

With respect to sending labour to foreign countries, in 2015 and 2016, Thailand had cooperated with several main destinations for Thai workers, such as Japan and Qatar. However, in the case of Japan, efforts have also included the skill development of Thai workers in both Thailand and Japan. Thailand has cooperated with governments, as well as the private and civil sectors for sending Thai workers to work and receive rights, benefits, and legal protection in the destination countries, such as the Republic of Korea, Israel, Japan, and Taiwan. Additionally, Thailand also provides workers with preparation for entry into the ASEAN Economic Community, including the learning of language skills, technical skills, management skills, specific career skills for Thai workers who are interested in working in other ASEAN countries, and labour in Special Economic Zones near the borders.

Regarding emigrant labour, Thailand has offered skill training, as well as education opportunities related to rights and legal protection in destination countries for workers who want to work in foreign countries. Thai government agencies and some destination countries have also cooperated to prepare Thai workers before they leave for work in those countries. For immigrant workers, Thailand has offered skill development for individuals from neighbouring government agencies who are responsible for sending their labour to work in Thailand. These efforts were made to enhance immigrant skills and provide training needed for them to be potential migrant workers.

### **Opportunities to utilise the role of open education through distance programmes for enhancing migrant labour skills and competencies.**

An open education system allows those who are interested to study anywhere and anytime, whether they are working locally or abroad. It also provides opportunities for people who want to improve their qualifications, as well as pick up knowledge and skills to work efficiently. Consequently, an open education system directly and indirectly brings about work-related benefits. Therefore, the system is useful to develop migrants' working abilities.

According to the findings (summarised in Table 1), both immigrants and emigrants disclosed that their needs for working in destination countries included language skills, related laws and rights benefits, as well as knowledge and skills for occupation. Knowledge

and skills for working will have a direct influence on the enhancement of skills and competencies. Language skills used for working and living in destination countries will have an indirect impact on labour skills and competencies because they will enable the workers to carry out their work more accurately and smoothly, and live in the host countries more easily. Having knowledge of related laws and rights as well as benefits for the migrants provided by both origin and destination countries will also have an indirect effect on work efficiency as the workers will be free from concerns about their work status.

i. Language skills:

Immigrants: Thai language includes skills (listening, speaking, reading, and writing) used for working, and the content should comprise knowledge about culture, lifestyle, and living in Thailand. The course should award a diploma certificate as it may be more interesting and useful to the migrants.

Emigrants: English language skills for Thai workers who want to work overseas, especially in ASEAN, as English is an official language.

ii. Related laws and rights benefits:

Immigrants: Labour protection, welfare, benefits and protected rights. Also including knowledge in occupational safety and health.

Emigrants: Labour rights and legal protection for Thai workers in destination countries.

iii. Knowledge and skills for occupations:

Immigrants: knowledge and skills for work needed by potential immigrants (unskilled workers) from neighbouring countries before entry into Thailand. Department of Skill Development, Ministry of Labour to cooperate with relevant organisations in the origin countries for providing training to officials of migrant origin countries to return to their countries to train local workers in preparation for work in Thailand. In addition, there are also areas in which training is needed for a large number of participants, such as computer skills. However, the main barrier to participation in the training is language.

Emigrants: The workers, excluding those in agricultural jobs, must be trained and tested before leaving. Examples of such workers are massage therapists and chefs. The Department of Skill Development has coordinated with recruitment and foreign training agencies to provide training to Thai workers who want to work abroad. In the case of skilled workers, such as welding skills, cooperation with training agencies in destination countries (e.g. Korea, Japan, Taiwan) was established.

**Table 1**

*Knowledge and skill requirement of migrant workers*

<b>2.1 Case of immigrant labour in Thailand</b>	<b>2.2 Case of Thai emigrant labours</b>
<p><b>Language skills:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Immigrant workers are interested in the study of the Thai language because it can be used at work. Thus, it is possible to offer Thai language courses via an open education system as suggested by most of the informants.</li> <li>• Language courses should consist of listening, speaking, reading, and writing since new immigrant workers usually require an interpreter to help in their communication. They realise that they should learn Thai as quickly as possible to be able to work efficiently.</li> <li>• Training content should also include knowledge about culture, lifestyle, and living in Thailand.</li> <li>• Organisations that would like to offer training courses can coordinate with the relevant networking agencies, such as the Labour Right Promotion Network Foundation (LPN). This can create a network and disseminate the training programmes to relevant members. In this effort, it is better to provide a diploma certificate as the qualification may be seen as more interesting and useful to foreign workers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Language skills:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Although labour movement liberalisation in ASEAN is an opportunity for Thai workers to work in ASEAN countries, Thai workers are often weak in English proficiency compared to other countries like Malaysia, the Philippines, and Singapore.</li> <li>• Open education systems will help develop the Thai workforce especially in English proficiency, which is the official language of ASEAN. However, the development of teaching materials should be improved.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Related laws and rights benefits:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour protection and welfare organisations and the workers' leaders themselves suggested that both Thai and foreign workers should equally know about their benefits and protected rights at all skill levels.</li> <li>• Occupational safety and health knowledge is also needed so that employees can avoid accidents or illnesses at work.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Related laws and rights benefits:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Labour rights and legal protection in destination countries for Thai workers.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Knowledge and skills for occupations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Informants from the Department of Skill Development, Ministry of Labour, recommended that workers should be trained and given knowledge or skills before they enter Thailand so that they can immediately start working in compliance with employer requirements. This department also informed the countries of origin to</li> </ul>	<p><b>Knowledge and skills for occupations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Department of Skill Development has coordinated with recruitment and foreign training agencies to provide training to Thai workers who want to work abroad. The workers, excluding those in agricultural jobs, must be trained and tested before leaving (e.g.</li> </ul>

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### 2.1 Case of immigrant labour in Thailand

provide their labour with knowledge and skills before they enter Thailand, as well as provide training for the staff to return to their home countries to train local workers before the latter enter Thailand.

- According to Thai regulations, foreign workers cannot receive skill development directly from the government agencies. However, employers can provide training for their migrant workers and receive tax credits for such training costs. The courses offered through an open education system may be arranged for employers in the areas where training is needed for a large number of participants, such as computer skills, which some agencies have already offered through classroom studies.
- The knowledge provided to workers should be consistent with their profession and meet their demands at various levels. However, the main barrier to participation in the training is language.

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### 2.2 Case of Thai emigrant labours

massage therapists and chefs). Since many people are seeking jobs in the Republic of Korea, Japan, South Africa, and Israel, these potential emigrants may be interested in related training programmes, especially in the case of skilled workers, such as welders.

- Some countries have established training agencies in Thailand to prepare Thai workers leaving for work in their respective countries, such as the Republic of Korea (HRD Korea), and Japan (IM Japan) offering language training, IOM Israel for training agricultural workers, and three agencies from Taiwan for training and testing for welders.
  - Though an open education system may not be able to play a direct role in the development of Thai labour skills, it may play an indirect role in providing Thai workers knowledge about language, legal literacy, and knowledge needed for living abroad.
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As mentioned earlier, distance education gives more prospective employment opportunities and meets the migrant needs (Gedviliene & Vaiciuniene, 2016). Distance education systems through distance education technology can be employed in the teaching and assessment of migrants (Ananchenkova & Kuznetsov, 2016). This system and online teaching can play a significant role in the development of emigrant labour competencies through both regular and specific programmes, before and after travelling to destination countries (Amante et al., 2018; Setiani et al., 2018). In Thailand, the course content necessary to meet migrant labour (i.e. immigrant and emigrant workers) demands and are of use to workers in conducting their jobs and upgrading their skills and qualifications through open and distance education consists of three areas: language skills, knowledge related to laws and rights benefits, and knowledge and skills for occupations. Knowledge and skills for occupations have direct effect on working skills and competencies. Language skills and knowledge related laws and rights benefits will have indirect effect on labour skills and competencies since these factors enable the workers to develop more skills and competencies. The programmes on language skills, related laws and rights benefits, and knowledge and skills for occupations can be offered to meet the migrants' needs via an open education system, especially online distance learning.

However, for Thailand, as immigrants are mostly unskilled workers and Thai emigrant labour are mainly skilled and semi-skilled workers, undergraduate degree programmes via open education should not be necessary. This is because the workers might not be interested in participating in the courses since there is less opportunity to learn and use the degree, and they usually focus only on carrying out existing tasks. Consequently, the possible programmes suggested by key informants for immigrant labour in Thailand and Thai emigrant labour are short courses. Furthermore, knowledge and skills are what the learners need and can be used immediately for existing work. However, training courses designed for low-skilled workers should be properly conducted to attract the learners' attention. The knowledge fields of the courses could be grouped into three areas, i.e. language skills, related laws, and skill craft development (see Table 1).

In addition to the knowledge and skill requirement of migrant workers shown in Table 1, the opportunities to carry out HRD regarding the migration of professional skilled labour in specific jobs such as tourist guides and nurses was also pointed out. In Thailand, professional associations, e.g. tourist guide and relevant agencies, like other careers, have played an impressive role in personnel quality control, for which there is a professional council that issues the occupational license. The license must be renewed upon expiry, and those who graduate from education institutions that provide study or training in the tourism field are required to take an exam at the professional level. This allows open universities to play a role in the development of professional human resources by collaborating with the professional council. For example, the establishment of relevant knowledge databases, training/educating the potential target learners through distance media, accredited courses/credits, preparation of examinations and exam problems, a library, and other initiatives related to the issuance of professional certificates can be carried out. However, the training for some professions is considered very difficult for immigrants. One example is the nursing profession, in which workers who opt to work in a nursing career in Thailand must gain knowledge during a five-year licensing period before extending their working license. They have to be trained according to the requirements of the Nursing Council Continuing Education Centre or the nursing colleges in Thailand.

## Discussion

This study revealed that in the context of international labour migration in Thailand, the implementation of competency policy was integrated with a labour migration policy. For instance, the MOU between Thailand and migrant-sending countries, i.e. the Cambodia-

Laos-Myanmar-Vietnam (or CLMV) group included rights and protections based on the relevant law and skill training provided for foreign workers. Specifically, the MOU between Thailand and The Lao PDR included skill development cooperation, which can be achieved by working together to develop skills and exchange information about skill development, strengthen skill development managers (both trainers and skill development staff) to upgrade labour skills as well as labour productivity (Thansettakij, 2016). With regard to Thai emigrants, Thailand has cooperated with public/private sectors in several main destination countries, such as Japan, Qatar, the Republic of Korea, Israel, and Taiwan in the skill development of Thai workers before travelling to work in these countries. Thailand also provides labour skills programmes in various areas (such as language skills, technical skills, management skills, specific career skills) to prepare Thai workers for entry into the ASEAN Economic Community. Thus, these efforts complement each other, i.e. both policies, and result in the benefits of migrants' home and host countries. However, there are some areas for improvement in practice for which the relevant organisations should be concerned, such as the employers should offer more training to immigrants, have better cooperation among related parties in skill development at the policy level, and monitor enforcement on skill training efforts of enterprises.

When comparing this study with others on upgrading migrant workers' competencies, such as those of the Philippines (Amante et al., 2018) and Indonesia (Setiani et al., 2018), there may be some limitations since the results of this study were derived from interviews with key informants and persons in relevant agencies, whereas the examples mentioned obtained results drawn from overseas students. However, their results are partly similar with those of this study, in which courses on communication, language, welfare and protection, laws and regulations, and rights should be offered to migrant workers in both home and host countries through distance media. This is because this system allows for convenience of accessibility.

Furthermore, the utilisation of distance education in developing migrants in the case of Thailand may also be different from other ASEAN countries as Thailand is a major importer of foreign labour and there are some Thai workers working overseas, whereas the Philippines and Indonesia are principally sending emigrant labour. The majority of immigrant workers in Thailand are unskilled labour from neighbouring countries, whereas most Thai emigrants are semi-skilled workers who have opted to work in many Asian and European countries. Therefore, the skill development programmes for these two groups of migrant workers must be differentiated. For immigrants, the courses should involve basic knowledge skills such as Thai language and those used for carrying out and improving their routine work, as well as related laws, rights, welfare and regulations in Thailand. For Thai emigrants, the courses should involve the preparation of Thai labour for working overseas, like learning the English language, skills for living abroad, working knowledge and skills needed abroad, as well as related laws/regulations, benefits and protections both in Thailand and in destination countries. Therefore, in order to yield more productive outcomes from distance learning in upgrading migrant workers, programmes have to be designed in ways that are suitable for different groups, i.e. immigrant workers in Thailand, and Thai emigrant workers. These efforts should involve short-term and distance education programmes that can be readily applied into the existing work of the workers. Additionally, the actual operation of these efforts requires cooperation between open and distance education institutions with various parties concerned, e.g. government and private agencies, industry/trade associations, related non-governmental organisations, professional associations, and the workers themselves. This will allow the programmes to be more practical and productive.

## Conclusion

Migrant labour in many countries is one of the most important production factors that contribute to the economic benefits of both home and destination countries of workers. These benefits largely rely on migrant labour skills and competencies that bring about the productivity of the labour. With respect to these issues, open education can play a major role in upgrading migrant labour skills and competencies that are both directly and indirectly used in their jobs, and finally enable them to carry out their work productively and efficiently. In the case of Thailand, more than two million migrant workers have been employed and a majority of them are unskilled labour, whereas more than 100,000 Thai semi-skilled and skilled labour workers have been exported to other countries. The study revealed that programmes offered for the migrant labour must meet worker demands in skills and competencies used for working, knowledge about living in host countries, as well as related laws/regulations benefits and protections. These should involve short-term and distance education programmes that can be readily applied in the existing work of workers, while cooperation between the various parties concerned and the workers themselves can make the programmes more practical and productive.

## Acknowledgement

The authors are grateful to the key informants from relevant agencies from the government, university and private sectors, non-governmental organisations, and representatives of foreign labour, for providing useful information concerning the implementation of labour migration and competency policies and measures in Thailand and their implications in utilising open and distance education in the development of migrant labours' skills and competency. We also would like to thank Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University for the research funding, and Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University Research Institute for the research facilities.

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