

Adaptive Coping Strategies of Indonesian Migrant Children in Malaysia: A Study on Counseling Approaches at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur

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ABSTRACT

Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia face various psychosocial challenges influenced by limited access to education, family economic conditions, administrative status, and minimal parental support. Various studies have examined the mental health and resilience of migrant children, but research on adaptive coping strategies reinforced thru guidance and counseling services in non-formal educational institutions is still relatively limited. This study aims to analyze the adaptive coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children and examine the contribution of counseling approaches in strengthening coping abilities at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur. The research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design. Participants were purposively selected, including the head of PKBM, teachers, students, and parents. Data were collected thru in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation, then analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña with credibility tests thru source triangulation, technique triangulation, and member checks. The research results show that migrant children face pressures stemming from their family's economic limitations, low parental supervision, and difficulties in academic and social adaptation. To cope with these conditions, students develop problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support coping strategies, with social support from teachers and peers being the most dominant strategy. The counseling approach thru personal guidance, character building, and emotional support has proven to strengthen students' problem-solving abilities, emotional regulation, self-confidence, and adjustment. These findings affirm that guidance and counseling services in non-formal education play a strategic role in strengthening the adaptive coping of migrant children while also providing conceptual and practical contributions to the development of psychosocial services for Indonesian migrant children abroad.

1. INTRODUCTION

The phenomenon of Indonesian labor migration to Malaysia continues to increase and brings consequences for the fulfillment of the basic rights of accompanying family members, including the child's right to receive education and develop optimally. In practice, some Indonesian migrant children face various limitations due to undocumented legal status, vulnerable family economic conditions, and high parental mobility (Simbolon, 2025). This situation causes access to formal education to be limited, so many children attend education thru PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur as an alternative educational institution that strives to ensure the continuity of educational services for migrant children (Robbani & Mulyah, 2026). In addition to facing limited access to education, migrant children are also in a condition that is vulnerable to various psychosocial pressures. Uncertainty of residency status, economic limitations, cultural adaptation processes, and different social environments can affect their psychological well-being and ability to carry out daily life (Cowling et al., 2025, Fadhilah et al., 2025). In such conditions, the ability to develop adaptive coping strategies becomes one of the important factors for children to manage stress positively, maintain

mental health, and adapt to their living and learning environments (Oktara et al., 2026). In addition to impacting the continuity of education, these various pressures have the potential to affect the psychosocial development of children in the long term if not addressed thru adaptive coping mechanisms (Wahyuni, 2025). Therefore, understanding the adaptive coping strategies developed by migrant children becomes important as a foundation for designing contextual guidance and counseling services that align with their psychosocial needs.

Several previous studies by Anukam et al., (2026) have shown that coping strategies have been extensively studied across various groups, but most of the research still focuses on university students, general adolescents, and migrant youth in different social contexts. Research on university students highlights the use of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping in dealing with academic pressure, while the study by Cowling et al., (2025) on adolescents and migrant youth emphasizes the importance of support from family, peers, community, and school in building resilience. Af'idah's research (2026) also shows that the school environment, social support, sense of security, and mental health services contribute to the psychological well-being of migrant children. Nevertheless, the available studies still focus more on aspects of mental health, resilience, and school environmental factors. Research specifically examining the adaptive coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children thru counseling approaches in non-formal educational institutions, particularly PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur, is still relatively limited. However, counseling services play a strategic role in helping children identify sources of stress, develop problem-solving skills, manage emotions, and build more adaptive self-adjustment (Marjo, 2024). The gap serves as the basis for this research to analyze the adaptive coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children in non-formal education at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur, while also identifying how teachers perform counseling functions to support the psychosocial adjustment of students, thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of the role of counseling in supporting the psychosocial adjustment of Indonesian migrant children (Anukam et al., 2026). Based on these conditions, this study aims to analyze the adaptive coping strategies possessed by Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia and examine how the counseling approach at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur contributes to strengthening their coping abilities. The results of this study are expected to enrich the study of guidance and counseling in the context of migrant children's education and serve as a basis for developing counseling services that are more responsive to the psychosocial needs of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia.

2. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative approach with a case study design to gain an in-depth understanding of the adaptive coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children and the implementation of counseling approaches at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur. This approach was chosen because it can comprehensively describe phenomena based on the experiences, perceptions, and social interactions of the participants in real-life contexts (Irfani & Qurroti, 2026). The case study design was selected because this research focuses on a deep understanding of the dynamics of adaptive coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children in the learning environment at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur. The research was conducted from May 12 to June 6, 2026, at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, which is a non-formal educational institution serving Indonesian children with limited access to formal education in Malaysia, particularly the children of migrant workers in Malaysia. The research subjects consisted of 35 fourth-grade students as the main informants, with the head of PKBM, teachers, and parents as supporting informants involved to obtain data triangulation. The selection of the research location is based on the characteristics of PKBM as an institution that not only provides educational services but also offers psychosocial

support to students facing various adaptation challenges. Research participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on the consideration that they possess knowledge and experience relevant to the research focus (Himam & Anam, 2026). The case study design was chosen because this research focuses on a deep understanding of the dynamics of adaptive coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children in the context of life and learning environments (Prasetiyo, 2025).

Data collection was conducted thru in-depth interviews, observations, and documentation. Interviews were used to explore participants' experiences regarding the pressures faced by migrant children, the coping strategies employed, and the counseling approaches implemented in PKBM. Observations were carried out to observe the interactions between teachers and students, the implementation of counseling services, and the dynamics of learning in the PKBM environment (Irawan & Pimada, 2025). Meanwhile, documentation is utilized to complement the research data thru various supporting documents, such as institutional profiles, counseling service programs, activity reports, and other relevant documents (A. Putri, 2025). Data analysis is conducted interactively using the Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña model, which includes three stages: data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The analysis process is conducted from the beginning of data collection until the research is completed, allowing researchers to delve deeper into findings that develop in the field (Saleh, 2023). Each analysis result is reviewed repeatedly thru a comparison process with field data to ensure that the interpretations produced remain consistent and align with the empirical facts obtained during the research (Achjar et al., 2023). To ensure the credibility of the research results, data validity tests were conducted thru source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information obtained from the head of PKBM, teachers, students, and parents, while technique triangulation was conducted by comparing the results of interviews, observations, and documentation. In addition, member checking was conducted by reconfirming the interview results and data interpretation with the participants to ensure that the research findings align with their actual experiences and conditions (Dewi & Sh, 2025).

3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

RESULT

Forms of Pressure Experienced by Indonesian Migrant Children

Research findings reveal that Indonesian migrant children at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur face various pressures related to family conditions, economic limitations, and minimal parental support. The majority of parents work from early morning until nite to meet the family's needs, leaving very little time available to interact with and support their children. This condition encourages teachers to not only fulfill their role as educators but also to act as surrogate parents who provide attention, guidance, and emotional support to the students. "Their parents have other economic commitments... therefore, parental attention to their own children is very limited, so the teachers here, beside being teachers, also play the role of second parents for them." (Interview with a teacher, June 4, 2026) This condition also affects the development of children's character and discipline. The teacher revealed that some students come from families with various issues, such as parents being busy with work, divorce, or lack of supervision at home. "They indeed lack discipline." "Sometimes the father is busy working, sometimes the parents are divorced, so the teacher has to instill good morals in them every day." (Interview with a teacher, June 4, 2026) These findings indicate that the pressures experienced by migrant children do not only stem from academic aspects but are also influenced by the family's socio-economic conditions and the lack of parenting support, thereby increasing the need for psychosocial assistance in the PKBM environment. This condition is reinforced by the results of interviews with students and parents. The findings regarding coping strategies and social support indicate a consistency between the teachers' perspectives and the experiences conveyed by the students and parents. Thus, the psychosocial pressures experienced by

migrant children are not solely identified based on teachers' perceptions, but also thru the direct experiences of students and parents who are directly confronted with those conditions.

Adaptive Coping Strategies for Migrant Children

The research results show that migrant children develop several forms of adaptive coping strategies, namely problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support coping. Problem-Focused Coping Children try to overcome learning difficulties by seeking help from teachers, attending extra classes, and studying with friends. "I always ask the teacher or the mentor if I don't understand something, sir." "If I still don't understand, I ask for extra classes to study more in-depth." (Interview with a student, May 16, 2026) Another student added: "I usually study in groups with friends and ask the teacher if what we did is correct or not" (Interview with a student, May 18, 2026) These findings indicate that children prefer to address the source of the problem directly by seeking academic help, which is a characteristic of problem-focused coping. Emotion-Focused Coping Another strategy found is the ability to manage emotions when facing conflicts or social pressures. "I stay silent first so I don't get angry back." "When I am calm, I talk about it nicely again." (Interview with a student, May 19, 2026) "I often talk to my close friends to feel more at ease." (Interview with a student, May 19, 2026) These findings indicate that the child attempts to manage their emotions first before resolving conflicts, resulting in adaptive responses. Social support coping Social support becomes the most dominant coping strategy in this study. Children receive support from teachers, peers, and study companions. "If the teacher says it's okay and always helps me study until I understand." (Interview with a student, May 19, 2026) "The KKN teacher and my group members were the most helpful to me." (Observation, May 19, 2026) The observation results also show that the teacher actively assists students who are experiencing difficulties, while peers help each other in group discussions. These findings show that social support plays an important role in enhancing the sense of security, self-confidence, and adaptability of migrant children. Counseling Approach at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur The research results show that counseling services at PKBM are conducted flexibly thru a personal approach tailored to the characteristics of each student. Teachers provide individual attention to children who experience learning difficulties or developmental obstacles. "We approach the child personally, asking about the parts they haven't understood, and then repeat the material until the child truly comprehends." (Interview with a teacher, June 3, 2026) The teacher also revealed that there are students who require different treatment according to their characteristics. "Some children need a different approach because their ability to understand the material is slower than their peers." (Interview with a teacher, June 3, 2026) In addition to individual counseling, the teacher builds warm relationships with students thru character habituation, intensive communication, and emotional support. This approach reflects counseling practices that are oriented toward the holistic development of students.

Supporting and Hindering Factors of Adaptive Coping Strategies The research results show that support from teachers, peers, and the learning environment are the main factors that strengthen the adaptive coping strategies of migrant children. Parents also acknowledge that the presence of PKBM has a positive impact on their children's development. One of the parents stated: "My child has become more polite than before, always greets people well, and is now more diligent in studying and doing homework." (Interview with a parent, May 25, 2026) Another parent also explained: "This PKBM is very helpful. "The children now have a place to study and receive attention from the teachers." (Interview with a parent, May 25, 2026) However, the research also found several hindering factors, namely the family's economic limitations, minimal parental support time due to work demands, and administrative conditions that restrict access to education. From the observation results, it also shows that despite facing various limitations, the children are still able to demonstrate positive social interactions thru group work, the courage to ask teachers questions, and mutual

assistance among friends during the learning process. The researchers' analysis shows that the combination of teacher support, peer support, and an inclusive learning environment can strengthen the adaptive coping strategies of migrant children. The existence of PKBM not only serves as an organizer of non-formal education but also as a space for psychosocial support that helps children cope with academic, social, and emotional pressures. Thus, the counseling services implemented in PKBM play an important role in enhancing the adaptability and psychological resilience of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia.

DISCUSSION

The Dynamics of Adaptive Coping in Indonesian Migrant Children

Perspective from Lazarus and Folkman's Theory The research results show that Indonesian migrant children at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur face various pressures stemming from family conditions, economic limitations, lack of parental attention, and difficulties in following the learning process. According to (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), these conditions are stressors, which are situations perceived by individuals as demands that exceed their available resources. The way individuals assess and respond to the stressor determines the form of coping strategy used (Puspitasari, 2026). Referring to the concept of cognitive appraisal in the Lazarus and Folkman theory, the stress faced by migrant children at the primary appraisal stage is assessed as a threat to the continuity of their education and psychological well-being. At the secondary appraisal stage, children evaluate the resources they have, such as support from teachers and peers, to determine the response they can take. The coping efforts that emerge, whether thru problem-focused or emotion-focused strategies, reflect the outcomes of the appraisal process, while changes in appraisal are observed when children who initially perceived learning difficulties as a threat gradually view them as challenges that can be overcome after receiving support from teachers. The findings in the research also show that migrant children tend to use problem-focused coping when facing academic difficulties. Children strive to find solutions by asking teachers, attending extra classes, or studying with friends. One of the students stated that when experiencing difficulties in learning, he chose to ask the teacher and request guidance until he fully understood the material. This strategy shows that the child does not avoid problems, but instead tries to change the situation that is the source of pressure thru constructive actions (Katili, 2026). Additionally, this study also found the use of emotion-focused coping. When facing conflicts with friends or experiencing emotional pressure, children choose to calm themselves first, then resolve the issue thru good communication. Some students also expressed that they find peace by sharing stories with close friends or teachers. These findings indicate that emotional management is an important part of children's adaptation process to the various pressures they experience (Astuti & Nur, 2025).

On the other hand, social support emerges as a factor that strengthens both forms of coping. Teachers, peers, and study companions become the main sources of support when children experience academic or emotional difficulties. Observation results show that teachers actively assist students who are experiencing difficulties, while peers help each other in group discussions. Thus, the dynamics of adaptive coping in migrant children are not only determined by individual abilities but are also influenced by the educational environment support they receive (Astuti & Nur, 2025). The Role of Counseling Approaches in Strengthening Adaptive Coping Research results show that the counseling approach implemented at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur contributes to strengthening the adaptive coping abilities of migrant children. However, it should be emphasized that the service has not yet been implemented formally as in general school counseling, and the teachers who carry it out are not certified professional counselors. Therefore, the term "counseling" in this study refers to the counseling-like function performed by teachers thru personal approaches, learning assistance, and continuous character development, rather than formal counseling services in

the scientific sense of guidance and counseling. The teacher explained that each child is treated according to their characteristics and needs. Children who experience learning difficulties are provided with individual support thru material repetition, intensive communication, and a more personal approach. This approach demonstrates the principle of person-centered counseling services, which involves understanding the condition of the students before determining the form of assistance provided (M. Putri, 2026). The main characteristics of the person-centered approach observed in the practices of teachers at PKBM include unconditional positive regard for each child's condition, empathy in understanding the difficulties experienced by the students, and alignment between the teacher's attitude and the needs of the child being supported. In addition to helping resolve academic issues, counseling also serves as a medium for building resilience in migrant children. Teachers not only provide solutions to learning difficulties but also create a sense of security, offer motivation, and become trusted figures for the students (Ulfah, 2025). This is evident from the statements of students who feel more confident and are not ashamed to ask questions after receiving guidance from their teachers (A'yuni, 2026). The counseling approach also provides a space for children to express the emotions they feel. Children feel more comfortable conveying difficulties, anxieties, or conflicts to teachers or peers rather than keeping problems to themselves (Gusrayani et al., 2025). This condition shows that the mentoring services at PKBM not only help in problem-solving but also support emotional regulation and the formation of positive interpersonal relationships. Thus, the counseling approach serves as a medium for strengthening adaptive coping thru the enhancement of problem-solving abilities, emotional management, and the development of social support (Masfufah et al., 2026).

Implications for the Education of Indonesian Migrant Children

The research findings provide several implications for the development of educational services for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. First, the research findings indicate that the needs of migrant children are not only related to academic services but also encompass psychological and social needs. Therefore, guidance and counseling services need to become an integral part of the educational administration in PKBM so that the learning process can address the various challenges faced by students (Sukmana et al., 2025). Second, this research highlights the importance of developing an educational-based psychosocial support model. Teachers in PKBM not only serve as deliverers of learning materials but also as companions who provide emotional support, motivation, and character development to students. That role becomes increasingly important considering that most parents have limited time to accompany their children due to work demands (Sadewa & Zahroh, 2026). Third, the research findings contribute to the development of educational policies for Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. Strengthening teachers' capacity in guidance and counseling services, providing sustainable psychosocial support programs, and enhancing collaboration between PKBM, families, and the Indonesian Embassy are expected to support the academic development and psychological well-being of migrant children (Irawan & Pimada, 2025). This recommendation is directly derived from research findings that teacher support, peer support, and the learning environment have proven to be the main factors strengthening the adaptive coping of migrant children, so strengthening these three aspects responds to the needs identified in the field and is not merely normative. Thus, the non-formal education organized by PKBM not only serves as an alternative access to education but also as an environment that supports the formation of resilience, adaptability, and optimal development of Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia (Dewi et al., 2026).

4. CONCLUSION

This research shows that Indonesian migrant children at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur face various pressures stemming from their family's economic limitations, minimal parental guidance

due to work demands, difficulties in following lessons, and social conditions that affect their adaptation process. In facing these various pressures, the children developed adaptive coping strategies that included problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and social support coping. The research findings also indicate that the counseling approach implemented at PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur plays a crucial role in strengthening the adaptive coping abilities of migrant children. Although the counseling services were carried out simply thru personal mentoring, character building, and emotional support, these practices appeared to be related to the development of self-confidence, problem-solving abilities, and the adjustment of students to various challenges they faced. Thus, this research contributes to the development of guidance and counseling science, particularly in the study of counseling services for migrant children in the context of non-formal education abroad. Practically, the research results indicate that the PKBM PNF KBRI Kuala Lumpur needs to continue strengthening guidance and counseling services thru a more systematic psychosocial support program, improving teachers' competencies in basic counseling services, and enhancing collaboration between schools, families, and the Indonesian community in Malaysia. These efforts are expected to optimally support the academic, social, and emotional development of migrant children. This research has limitations because it was conducted in one research location with a limited number of participants, so the results cannot yet be generalized to all Indonesian migrant children in Malaysia. In addition, this research focuses more on the experiences of students and teachers within the context of PKBM, so it does not yet depict the conditions of migrant children in other non-formal educational institutions. Based on these limitations, it is recommended that future research involve more PKBM or Sanggar Bimbingan in various regions of Malaysia to obtain a more comprehensive picture of the coping strategies of Indonesian migrant children. Future research can also develop a psychosocial-based guidance and counseling service model that aligns with the characteristics of migrant children and test its effectiveness in enhancing resilience, psychological well-being, and the adaptation success of students.

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