

## Opportunities and Challenges in Developing Distance Education Services Open University for Indonesian Citizens in Malaysia

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### ABSTRACT

The Indonesian Open University (UT) has had extensive experience in providing, implementing, and developing educational services in Indonesian and abroad. Several problems related to the planned development of Distance Education Services (PJJ-UT), have become obstacles that hinder the smooth expansion and management of UT abroad. This paper aims to analyze the opportunities and challenges in developing PJJ-UT in Malaysia. The approach used in this study is a qualitative method. The data are collected through participant observation as well as unstructured in-depth interviews involving resources ranging from UT managers, students, and alumni. The results: (1). Many fresh graduates from Senior High School, have departed for Malaysia before the time of receiving their graduation certificate. They are constrained from realizing their intention to continue their study while working; (2). Indonesian illegal migrants who have joined as students, have limited space for movement and are being arrested by Malaysian authorities; (3). Implementation of the mandatory overtime system at workplace, prevented students from participating in examinations; (4). The distance of the student coverage area, resulted in delays in taking academic activities; (5). The dropping out phenomenon among students who are not motivated to study is high, especially after returning to their homeland.

**Keywords:** PMI in Malaysia, PJJ Program for PMI, Study While Working.

## INTRODUCTION

### Background

The Open University Distance Education Service (PJJ-UT) in Malaysia, started in 2009. The efforts to provide distance education are strongly supported by Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) and have the desire to develop themselves through increasing educational capacity. The realization of educational services for PMI was eventually turned into a community development program which later influenced the establishment of UT Pokjar Johor Bahru in 2009, UT Pokjar Kuala Lumpur and UT Pokjar Penang in early 2012. To increase the qualifications of local teachers at the Community Learning Center (CLC) in Sabah and Sarawak, then UT Pokjar Kota Kinabalu-Tawau was established in 2015 and UT Pokjar Kuching in 2020. (Salengke, T.H., 2020); (Handayani, *et al.*, 2021).

The legal basis for implementing PJJ-UT as an education service center for PMI abroad is based on the Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 13 of 2003 concerning Manpower, Law of the Republic of Indonesia No. 39 of 2004 concerning the Placement and Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers, and Law No. 18 of 2017 concerning the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers. The law in principle regulates the mechanism for placing and protecting the rights and obligations of workers abroad, including the right to access information, education, and training in an effort to increase the educational capacity and skills of migrant workers to achieve competitive quality of Indonesian human resources. (Fuadi, 2021).

In implementing services for providing access to education services for Indonesian citizens abroad, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Open University have signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Increasing Access and Implementation of Higher Education Services Abroad through the Open and Distance Education System of the Open University, Number RPJ/DL/01960/09/2019/03 and Number 2460/UN31.WR.4/HK.01.00/2019 dated 12 September 2019 and the Cooperation Agreement between the Open University and the Indonesian Migrant Worker Protection Agency regarding Human Resource Capacity Building for the Migrant Workers Protection Agency Indonesia and Indonesian Migrant Workers through the Open University No.2854/UN31.WR.4/HK.08.00/2021 and No.01/KA-PKS/IV/2021.

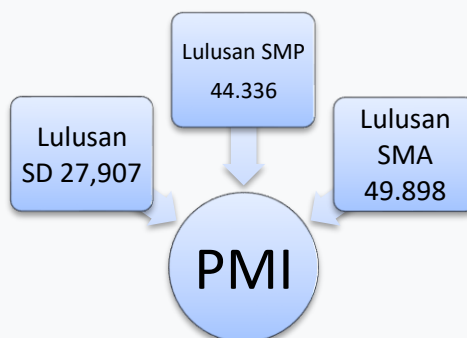
Malaysia is an important country for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) to work. Many job opportunities, geographical proximity, and cultural similarities are the main attractions for PMI to work in Malaysia. (Anita, *et al.*, 2021). After the 1997-1998 reform wave, there was a shift in the motive for the migration of Indonesians to Malaysia, which was dominated by young people. These young people have great potential to be recruited into online learning programs through the PJJ-UT program in five branches called "Pokjar-UT" which spread across Peninsular Malaysia and Sabah-Sarawak. (Salengke, T.H. & Suharto, A. *et al.*, 2018); (Salengke, 2020). The expansion of distance education services by UT is in line with the state's mandate in the 1945 Constitution Article 27 paragraph 2 that "*Every citizen has the right to work and a decent living for humanity*", further Article 28D paragraph 2 The 1945 Constitution states "*Every citizen has the right to work and receive fair and proper remuneration and treatment in an employment relationship*."

The following from the 2020 BP2MI annual report which shows data for the last three years of PMI placements based on the five highest placement destination countries, known that Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia is high potential, as follows:

NO	COUNTRY	2018	2019	2020	SUM
1.	Hongkong	73.917	70.840	53.206	198.263
2.	Taiwan	72.373	79.574	34.415	186.362
3.	Malaysia	90.664	79.662	14.630	184.956
4.	Singapura	18.324	19.354	4.474	42.152
5.	Saudi Arabia	5.894	7.018	1.793	14.705

**Source:** Annual report by BP2MI year 2020.

The existence of Indonesian Migrant Worker (PMI) in Malaysia, which is dominated by young people with high school graduates, is a great opportunity for the UT and other universities to expand the role of online-based education services or semi-online concepts. The fact of the dominance of young high school graduates (SMA) who migrated abroad is reinforced by data from the 2020 Indonesian Migrant Worker Placement and Protection Agency (BP2MI) annual report through <https://bp2mi.go.id/>, that of 113,173 placements abroad, as many as 49,898 PMI graduates from high school. The data shows great potential for distance education service providers to encourage them to increase their educational capacity through PJJ programs.



**Source:** Annual report by BP2MI year 2020.

Erawan (2021), interested parties often neglect their duties and responsibilities to increase the capacity of PMI candidates because they tend to pursue business targets. This is also one of the reasons why there are so many illegal PMIs in Malaysia, because they depart without sufficient information and knowledge and work insight. Based on the facts on the ground, various administrative problems faced by PMI who want to study while working through distance education at the Open University, such as not having a legal document, diploma certificate, because they are still being held at school or being a guarantee at an agency. This condition makes potential new students who should be recruited as UT students in Malaysia, forced to cancel due to technical administrative reasons.

Furthermore, from the legal aspect of the country of placement destination, PJJ-UT services abroad have not received official legality from the local government. The management of UT is still limited to collaboration with the local Indonesian representative office and has received special recognition from the nearest Indonesian representative office. In the absence of legal recognition from the local country, the Indonesian representative office has absolutely no authority to intervene if there is a problem with the company not giving leave permission to its employees to take the end of semester exams or other student activities for reasons of a mandatory overtime system in the workplace.

### **Formulation of the Problem**

- What are the opportunities and challenges that hinder in developing the Distance Education (PJJ) for Indonesian Migrant Workers in Malaysia?
- How to deal with the obstacles faced by UT Pokjar and UT students in Malaysia in order to achieve the target of education services for PMI in Malaysia?

### **Research Purposes**

- To identify problems that become obstacles for UT and UT Pokjar in developing the Distance Education (PJJ) program in Malaysia.
- To formulate a more appropriate mechanism in developing and strengthening the work of UT Pokjar in order to achieve the target of education services for PMI in Malaysia.

### **Benefits of research**

This research is important and very useful in identifying the problems that become obstacles for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI) to continue their education to a higher level while abroad. It is also important for the Open University (UT) to expand and develop distance education services for PMI abroad. The benefits that can be taken are:

- Regulatory makers will be able to deal with recruitment regulations in the country and the placement of PMIs in overseas to support them in increasing their educational capacity and developing scientific insights.
- For the development of knowledge, it will be very useful as a material for consideration for policy makers and also knowledge for PMI candidates.
- For stakeholders to get an idea of how to deal with the existing obstacles to encourage PMIs to increase their educational capacity and skills while wandering abroad.
- PMI candidates will get knowledge and information regarding the opportunity to study while working in abroad, so that from they can prepare the necessary documents.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Several previous studies related to education for Indonesian citizens in Malaysia that can provide a gap to be discussed in this article, are as follows:

**Handayani. (2021)**, examines cooperation in the field of education for Indonesian children between the governments of Indonesia and Malaysia which focuses on the mechanism for the placement and protection of Indonesian migrant workers in Malaysia. The education of PMI children in Malaysia is part of the protection of workers, both by the company and the local government. Educational services for PMI children in Sabah, the Kota Kinabalu Indonesian School (SIKK) has been established and it is stated that local teachers at the Community Learning Center (CLC). For CLC teachers whose educational capacity has not yet reached the undergraduate level, they are directed to study at the Open University (UT) with the assistance of scholarship funds.

**Yuangga & Sunarsi (2020)**, that learning activities with the concept of Distance Education (PJJ) have many problems in the field, especially during the Covid-19 pandemic, such as the need for additional costs to be able to access the internet, the lack of readiness of students and teachers, both knowledge and skills. skills in mastering internet-based learning. Therefore, it is necessary to develop simpler learning media to overcome the PJJ learning problems, especially increasing the creativity of teachers in

utilizing learning media so that they are more interesting and can be understood by students.

**Arulogun, et al. (2020)**, the concept of distance learning with certain applications, needs to be combined with social media platforms as an alternative way to be able to complement each other in delivering learning materials to students. To maximize the distance learning process, it is necessary to use formal and informal channels, considering the main obstacle is the expensive learning media which must be supported by the availability of an adequate internet network. Generally, students complain about the various obstacles in distance learning which of course have an impact on the level of student understanding of the material presented by the lecturer/tutor.

**Putra, R.A.M. (2020)** that distance learning is more effective and efficient where the use of learning media and creativity in it are the key points for successful learning. However, there are various obstacles, both from the learning media system, teacher readiness, and also students. The learning process still needs an emotional touch and this happens during face-to-face learning which greatly determines the process of growing interest, motivation, and learning independence of students, and can freely control the development of learning.

**Sari, et al. (2020)**, that learning activities are the core of an educational process, both face-to-face and long-distance (PJJ) implementation. Both learning systems have advantages and disadvantages. In his research, he looks at the form of PJJ applied by education units, analyzes the impact of PJJ, and overcomes obstacles in implementing the PJJ system. It was concluded that PJJ's constraints were still related to supporting facilities and the availability of internet networks.

**Cucus, et al. (2016)**, that in developing distance learning (PJJ) it is necessary to build a supporting multi-media system to overcome the problem of internet network availability. This means that institutions can build an intranet system so that they are not too dependent on the internet network service center in general. content must get important attention, because in distance learning, participants learn to get material with a greater proportion of reading content independently rather than face to face with the teacher, the application of multimedia in distance learning content will help students absorb more material learning, this is proven by the increase in student learning outcomes who study using the concept of blended learning using multimedia than those who study independently.

On average, previous studies discussed distance learning mechanisms in general and tended to analyze the advantages and disadvantages of online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic. There is a study on education cooperation between Indonesia and Malaysia focusing on providing educational services for Indonesian children in Malaysian oil palm plantations for the compulsory education level.

The discussion about the development of distance learning for Indonesian citizens working abroad for higher education through the Open University study group (Pokjar) has not been specifically touched, so this section becomes a gap in this research.



## **RESEARCH METHOD**

This study is a case study with a descriptive qualitative approach that requires an explanation of a process regarding the phenomena experienced by the UT Pokjar administrators and also students which cannot be done by measuring the frequency alone. Descriptive qualitative is a method that serves to analyze or describe a result of the object of research, although it is not used to provide broader conclusions in general. (Sugiyono, 2017).

Quantitative research does aim to produce generalizations as a result of estimation methods based on measurements of existing facts as a sample that represents a statement of truth that occurs or may occur for a large population. (Latif, 2018)

Collecting data in the field using participatory observation techniques (participant observation) and unstructured in-depth interviews. Valid data will be obtained with the correct research method to determine the level of quality of research reports that are able to produce novelty. Liu (2017) explains that the problem of data validity in the data collection system will greatly determine the quality of research and the quality of research reports. Therefore, in the research it is necessary to propose several data-based methodologies to increase the validity of the data and provide some insight on the specific impact of data shortages or loss. To support this research and at the same time get better results, the authors interviewed several key informants, consisting of Pokjar administrators, students, and UT alumni in Malaysia.

Furthermore, to enrich the primary data above, the researcher also explores secondary data by conducting literature studies from various written sources related to the characteristics of supporting the management of distance learning services which can then be analyzed as supporting material for this research report. Shofiyah & Wulandari (2018) describes an example of research using library research, in this case, researchers need to follow applicable rules such as systematically identifying theories, finding literature, and analyzing documents that contain information related to the research topic to compile the material in a systematic manner, and can classify it as relevant and irrelevant. Yuangga & Sunarsi (2020) explained that the data obtained from the results of the literature review is very important and useful to strengthen the existence of primary data obtained directly in the field.

## **RESULTS**

The results of this study indicate that:

1. Many young fresh graduates are tempted to work abroad with a nominal fantastic salary, even though they have just received a graduation announcement and have not received a diploma certificate, so that when they are abroad and want to continue studying at UT, they are constrained by administrative completeness requirements.
2. Illegal PMI and legal PMI who become illegal while studying face difficulties in participating in student activities, especially offline final semester exams need to be accommodated by the implementation of online examination.
3. The existence of a mandatory Over Time (OT) policy that hinders the smooth learning and examination of students in Malaysia, the TTM Webinar needs time flexibility.
4. Malaysia's vast geography and becoming an obstacle for students when they will take off-line TTM and offline end-of-semester exams, need a UAS Take Home Exam (THE) mechanism which is valid for 24 hours.
5. The phenomenon of dropping out of college among students with low learning motivation can be overcome by various student activities, both academic and

extracurricular. Thus, students will feel more directed and confident about the programs taken in lectures.

## DISCUSSION

Based on the results obtained from this study, it can be clarified with some information, both from UT managers and from UT students and alumni in Malaysia, as follows:

***First: PMI cannot go to college because the certificate is still in school or is used as collateral at the company/agency.***

Responding to fresh graduates who are tempted to work abroad after receiving an announcement of graduation, even though they have not received a diploma certificate. It is difficult to realize them to study at UT while overseas, UT needs to work together with the Director General of Education and Culture so that schools provide cooperation in issuing legalization of diplomas so that prospective students can continue their education. them while working abroad. It was found that prospective new students who failed to enter UT at Pokjar Kuala Lumpur because their diplomas were still being held by the school were 16 people in 2000, 13 people in 2021, and 18 people in 2022. In other cases, many PMIs used a high school diploma as a guarantee of departure at the sending company. labor services. The family or PMI can only take a diploma if the person concerned has paid all the costs of the departure process abroad.

Based on game theory, where the company employing labor as a player will behave more cooperatively with the government, stakeholders and PMI itself by receiving rewards from the results of their interactions that are understood rationally. (Mustika, 2016). In principle, the elements in game theory consist of players, rewards, and game strategies, all of which are closely related to efforts to influence the existence and strategies of other players, even destroying the existence of other players in order to overcome or win the game. Game theory combines rationality by incorporating elements of general knowledge assumptions, making it possible to anticipate things that become the strategy of the other party, even though rationality is not a characteristic of social interaction in general. PMIs consciously hand over diplomas as collateral, and the company realizes that diplomas as securities can be used as a bond between them and PMIs who have debts for managing departures abroad. Colman (2003). Altintas & Utlu (2021) explain that game theory is an appropriate approach to observing events where one party tries to influence another player through different strategic decisions that can be made unilaterally to influence the other party's game based on rationality estimates.

Responding to these problems, the Government, in this case the Menakertrans, BP2MI, and other relevant ministries should ensure that all fresh graduates who will be sent abroad must complete all document matters in the form of diplomas in their respective schools. The company recruiting prospective workers also checks the school first, so that the company recruiting workers is not impressed by collaborating with the school in recruiting prospective workers.

Considering that many PMIs use diplomas as collateral in PJTKI companies, then as a solution, UT can receive a SHUN for registration of PMIs at least for the first semester while waiting to complete the diploma file, with no exceptions for those who have just graduated. Furthermore, in collaboration with BP2MI and the Minister of Manpower and Transmigration to urge PJTKI not to make the original diploma as a guarantee for PMI abroad, it is enough to use the SHUN or previous level diploma, so that PMI abroad can easily participate in distance education programs.

In essence, the things that must be considered by PMI candidates who want to study while working without being overseas are: (1). While still in the country prior to the placement process, PMI should have completed documents such as diplomas and legalization, ID cards, copies of Family Cards (KK), and other supporting documents. (2). Once in the country of placement, PMI contacts the closest Pokjar management and submits the entry requirements as an Open University student.

***Second: Constraints of illegal PMI who study while working***

The existence of illegal PMI in Malaysia clearly violates the provisions of Law no. 18 of 2017 concerning the necessity to place a fully documented PMI. However, not a few PMIs were originally legal, but due to various problems in the workplace it became illegal. At UT Pokjar Kuala Lumpur, there are many students who do not have a residence permit in Malaysia (legal). It is these students who are constrained in participating in student activities, so that it has an impact on the decline in their enthusiasm for learning. Those who are illegal often do not follow the Face-to-Face Tutorial (TTM), off-line final exams (UAS), and various other activities perfectly. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to establish a fully on-line method of implementing learning and exams.

Meanwhile, from a Malaysian legal perspective, living and working without a valid permit is a matter under section 6(3) of the Immigration Deed 1959/63 (Deed 155), which is a violation of section 6(1) ©. If they are caught, they face a prison sentence not exceeding five years or a material fine not exceeding RM10,000 (Ten Thousand Malaysian Ringgit) or both as stipulated under Section 6(3) of the Immigration Deed 1959/63 (Deed 155). When a very fatal mistake can also be lashed not exceeding 6 lashes. (<https://www.imi.gov.my/>).

According to Kristovel (2021), students who study while working or vice versa have a high positive impact on the development of one's character and self-confidence. The results of his research show that there is a positive and significant relationship between self-confidence and hardiness, where the p value is  $0.000 < 0.005$ . This means that it is smaller than the probability of 0.005. The results also show that the contribution of self-confidence to hardiness is 49.8%. In fact, according to Daulay (2015) that the success of a person studying in higher education will be achieved from the ability to self-regulate in every need, including working while studying. It's just that most students are often negligent and unable to manage their time well, thus causing low academic achievement so that they drop out of school/college. (Mardelina, 2017).

***Third: There is a mandatory Over Time (OT) policy in the workplace***

The mandatory Over Time (OT) policy where UT students work is a separate obstacle for students and Pokjar managers in Malaysia because it hinders smooth learning and end-of-semester exams, both offline and on-line exams called Take Home Exam (THE). Mandatory OT work in Malaysia is often applied in crucial situations, namely when large quantities of raw goods are imported for processing at the factory. In addition, mandatory OT is also enforced when high orders are demanded from customers who want production at a certain time. As a basis for implementing mandatory OT for workers in the manufacturing sector, it is regulated in the Employment Deed of 1955.

So, for the Face-to-Face Webinar Tutorial (Tuweb) it is necessary to pay attention to time flexibility. Likewise, offline exams which have been going well so far, namely on Sundays, where students generally leave work on weekends. However, as an additional note, of course in other countries besides Malaysia, it is very difficult with the conditions for the exam at 07.00 WIB, because at that time, there are countries that are still in the middle



of the night and some are already in the afternoon. This means that it is impossible to hold the exam simultaneously and if so, it is also necessary to use different questions, because if the questions are the same, then the questions that have been tested in a country whose morning time is the same as WIB, have the potential to leak questions during the exam, given the time difference between the two exams. The country where students take the exam is quite far.

***Fourth: Geographical factors, distance or reach of Pokjar.***

Malaysia's vast geography with a small number of Pokjars becomes an obstacle for students when they will take offline TTM and offline end-of-semester exams. One way out is the implementation of THE UAS which can be accessed for 24 hours. The importance of implementing THE exam duration within 24 hours will help PMIs who work the morning shift to access exam questions at night and vice versa who work the night shift to access exam questions during the day.

The Pokjar needs to determine the unit cost of credits that are adjusted to the local currency value to make it easier for students who do not have mobile banking to make payments to the administrator. On the same occasion, the administrator who handles the registration process and student tuition payments more easily monitors the activities of students under their Pokjar. Likewise, Pokjars need to have cash funds as additional operational costs related to exams and other student activities, given the wide coverage area, consisting of several provinces for one Pokjar.

UT Pokjar abroad is given the authority to socialize and promote themselves according to the situation and conditions in their respective regions without any intervene. The Center for Overseas Student Services (PPMLN) contributes to providing socialization materials as well as funding, given the breadth of reach and the amount of costs required for this purpose.

***Fifth: The phenomenon of dropping out among student who have returned to their homeland***

The low motivation in study and also economic problems have the potential for the sustainability of a student in learning. If these two things weaken, it will affect the low achievement of students who eventually drop out of college. Khoiriyah (2021) said that in Indonesia there are still many school and university students who drop out of education due to family economic factors. With the number of children dropping out of school in Indonesia, especially among college students, it will be able to affect the welfare of the nation, such as unemployment and crime rates which will definitely increase. The use of the scholarship program is one solution to increase student motivation and student learning which will certainly have a positive and important impact on their academic achievement and reduce dropout rates.

Regarding the dropout phenomenon among UT students who incidentally PMI in Malaysia, to overcome this phenomenon, Pokjar administrators in Malaysia will always maximize student activities outside of the academic schedule. In Kuala Lumpur, for example, the activities are divided into three parts, namely:

**First**, academic activities such as tutorials, training, seminars, and group studies.

**Second**, social and religious activities such as blood donation in collaboration with the Malaysian Blood Center (PDN) or the nearest hospital, breaking fast together, recitation, and other informal activities.

**Third**, recreational activities such as UT Camp which is routine every year after the second semester final exam, hiking, and so on.

In addition, to anticipate the high number of UT Pokjar Kuala Lumpur students who dropped out of college after PMI returned to their homeland, especially in the midst of the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic which had a major impact on the number of PMIs, since 2019, the Pokjar management created a scholarship program "RM1,000 Until Graduation". The cost of student contribution of RM1,000 (equivalent to three million five hundred thousand rupiah). In this case, the Pokjar management will seek assistance from sponsors in Malaysia. Thus, students who have returned to their homeland and have not found work in their hometown, will still be able to continue their studies well, without worrying about dropping out of college in the middle of the road.

Students who return to their homeland are allowed to remain under the previous Pokjar, without being required to move to the nearest Pokjar and UPBJJ within the country. However, students are still given the choice whether they want to continue with their original Pokjar or move to the nearest Pokjar. The call to stay with the original Pokjar is very important considering that PMIs who work abroad are only on 1–2 year contracts, then return to their homeland after the end of the work contract.

Thus, the number of students abroad is very dynamic up and down, because it is influenced by the factor of work contracts. Therefore, as an effort to ensure that the number of Pokjar students abroad does not drop drastically in the event of a large number of labor repatriations, as has happened in the last two years during the Covid-19 pandemic.

## **CONCLUSION**

The high number of young high school graduates who migrate abroad, especially to Malaysia, is an opportunity for the Open University (UT) to develop and strengthen distance education services for Indonesian Migrant Workers (PMI). In practice, education services for PMI abroad have been regulated in the MoU between the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Open University.

The mechanism for developing distance learning services at the Open University in Malaysia, needs to pay attention to and understand the criteria for problems experienced by PMI from the recruitment process in the area of origin to placement in the destination country.

In developing PJJ services for PMI abroad (Malaysia), it is very important to adjust PMI recruitment regulations as prospective students based on labor regulations in the destination country, so that students can still study while working, because the administrative completeness has been prepared before departure.

Likewise, the problem of students working in plantation areas that are far from the city (remote areas), apart from distance constraints, there are also internet connectivity problems. Even PMIs in the informal sector who work in the city also have problems with permission from the employer, considering that the presence of a domestic assistant is expected to be available at all times near the employer.

### **SUGGESTION**

From the results of the discussion and conclusions above, the authors suggest several things related to the management and development of Open University distance education services abroad, as follows:

1. The government encourages companies that employ Indonesian workers to provide access to information and convenience for PMIs who want to study while working.
2. The government or companies should first confirm whether prospective workers have completed the administration and taken important school documents before leaving abroad.
3. The government prohibits companies that recruit workers from using diplomas as collateral, considering that many companies have gone out of business so that important documents belonging to PMI are not guaranteed, even lost.
4. The implementation of academic activities, both lectures and examinations for UT students abroad, should be determined on-line, considering the wide coverage area of the Pokjar and the complexity of local state regulations, as well as accommodating the obstacles experienced by illegal PMIs.
5. The Open University further strengthens cooperation with Open Universities abroad to accommodate lectures, exams and other activities as an effort to build student enthusiasm for learning.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

For further research, it is possible to examine the factors and dropout rates among UT students who study while working, either due to low motivation to study or due to expiration of work contracts abroad, as well as due to the tight schedule of the company and tight local state regulations.

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