

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Study

English has been widely recognized as an international language and one of the most spoken languages in the world. Rayner (2001) argued that English is the most widely used international language, with speakers spread across five continents. It is used not only by native speakers but also by the global community, especially in modern contexts such as science, politics, and economics. Its flexibility and ability to absorb elements from various cultures make it relevant in many fields. As a global means of communication, English is often chosen as a language of instruction that facilitates interaction and understanding among people from different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Furthermore, in the era of globalization and technological advancement, the role of English continues to grow stronger. Crystal (1995), in his book "English as a Global Language," explained that English has developed into a global language used by around 1.5 billion speakers and functions as a *lingua franca*, enabling communication between people with different mother tongues. Therefore, mastering English is an essential skill for accessing broader opportunities in various fields.

Learning English in every country is currently very important, serving as a bridge connecting various cultures, economies, and technologies around the world and supporting the era of globalization. Oktavia (2021) emphasized that mastery of English is crucial in the modern era. She argued that the ability to speak English is not only a plus but also one of the main skills that individuals must have to be able to compete and adapt in an increasingly connected global environment. English has become the main connecting language in international communication. In addition, English proficiency also opened up access to a wider range of knowledge and resources, such as professional literature, international training, and more diverse career opportunities.

By learning English, one would have a more internationally exposed level of insight and knowledge that would open up wider employment opportunities. (Lubis et.al 2024) stated that English proficiency could facilitate job searches and expand career opportunities, especially job opportunities for migrant workers.

Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) are individuals who left Indonesia to seek employment abroad. According to Law No. 18/2017 on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers "Law on the Protection of Indonesian Migrant Workers" Article 1, paragraph 2, an Indonesian migrant worker is every Indonesian citizen who will, was, or has done work by receiving wages outside the territory of the Republic of Indonesia. This profession could not be separated from English as an international language and as an alternative language to be able to communicate. According to Oktavia (2021), mastery of English is very important for IMWs because it directly affects their ability to compete in the international labor market. Migrant workers usually migrate to various countries in search of better jobs or economic opportunities. IMWs helped in increasing the country's economic income. Bank Indonesia (BI) stated in 2023 that the amount of state income contributed by IMWs reached Rp230.81 trillion or around 10% of Indonesia's total foreign exchange reserves. The role of IMWs was very important considering their real contribution to the national economy. The Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI), as a government agency, has the main task of protecting, regulating, and supervising Indonesian migrant workers, both before departure to the destination country, while working in the destination country, and after returning to the country. BP2MI noted that there were 274,695 migrant workers placed abroad throughout 2023. There was an increase of 36.93% compared to the previous year, which amounted to 200,082 workers. In 2024, during the period January to June 2024, there were 160,496 migrant workers placed in various destination countries. 79,344 (migrant workers) were placed in the formal work sector, while the rest worked in the informal sector.

Singapore is one of the main destination countries for Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs), particularly in the informal sector, such as domestic work (Home helpers). Over the past few decades, the demand for domestic workers in Singapore has continued to grow in line with the high participation of women in the workforce and the increasing reliance of urban families on domestic services. According to data from the Ministry of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia (2024), Singapore ranked fifth among destination countries for the placement of IMWs, with a total of 5,068 workers as of mid-year. In a previous report published by Sediksi (2023), Singapore was listed in sixth place, with 6,153 Indonesian migrant workers. Although not in the top three, Singapore remained a key destination, especially considering that the majority of IMWs working in the country were employed in the informal/domestic sector. Data from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023) showed that more than 60% of Indonesians residing in Singapore worked as domestic helpers. This confirmed that Singapore was a significant labor market for Indonesian workers in this field.

With many Indonesian migrant workers having a high interest in working in Singapore, learning English was very important to be taught and mastered by prospective Indonesian Migrant Workers. LPK (Job Training Institution) played a vital role in ensuring that IMWs who would be dispatched to Singapore had the necessary skills and knowledge before migrant workers were dispatched, in the hope of being able to prepare prospective Indonesian migrant workers who were qualified and could compete internationally. According to Stoner (1995), communication is a process in which a person seeks to provide understanding and information by conveying messages to others. English language training is an important aspect that IMWs must understand (Lubis et al.2024), and LPK is taught as a provision to be able to communicate well with potential work partners. According to Brown (2004), "speaking is an activity that involves two or more people in which the participants are both listeners and speakers having to act on what they listen to and make meaningful contributions." LPK, as an institution in charge of language preparation for prospective Indonesian migrant

workers, had to be able to provide a learning model that was easy to understand and relevant, considering that English was a language that was quite difficult to learn for people whose mother tongue was not English.

English, as a foreign language rather than a mother tongue for Indonesian people, has consistently posed a significant obstacle throughout the language learning process for prospective Indonesian migrant workers. This condition also presents a considerable challenge for LPK institutions, which must find effective ways to introduce a completely unfamiliar language to learners for whom English functions as a second, and often distant, language. This issue was first identified through an interview conducted during a very initial observation at Lembaga Pelatihan Kerja Swasta (LPKS) Nur Mutiara Bangsa, where the researcher sought to understand the learners' background and their difficulties in learning English before the research began. Before examining the specific difficulties these learners face, it is important to understand their starting point: many prospective Indonesian migrant workers come from relatively low educational backgrounds, and a considerable number had never received any formal English instruction prior to joining the training program. For these learners, English is not simply a subject to review or strengthen, but an entirely new system of communication they must build from the ground up. Their competence upon entering training is therefore predominantly at a beginner level, with many falling into the zero-beginner category, meaning they possess little to no prior vocabulary, grammar awareness, or listening exposure to draw on. This beginner-level starting point has direct implications for how instructional materials must be designed, as content pitched too far above learners' existing ability risks discouraging engagement rather than building competence.

Krashen (1982) argued that second language acquisition can occur in a manner like first language acquisition, emphasizing that language learning depends not only on mastering grammar rules but also on developing the ability to communicate effectively in real situations. This perspective is particularly relevant for beginner-level adult

learners, who benefit more from meaningful, comprehensible exposure to the language than from abstract grammatical instruction alone. In practice, this initial interview identified three primary difficulties faced by prospective IMWs: pronouncing English words, practicing spoken dialogue in realistic workplace situations, and comprehending verbal instructions or work orders given by employers. These challenges are particularly significant for workers bound for Singapore, where English serves as the primary medium of instruction in domestic settings. Limited understanding of English could lead to misunderstandings in communication with interlocutors, which in turn could disrupt interaction and work performance. Therefore, developing a solid understanding of English is essential for prospective Indonesian migrant workers, given that communication in English will inevitably occur once they begin working in Singapore. By building a good foundation in English from their current beginner level, Indonesian Migrant Workers would be able to communicate more effectively, helping to facilitate their work and gradually improve their overall language competence.

To address these issues, this study employed a Research and Development (R&D) approach following Borg and Gall's (1983) model to design, develop, and validate the Smart Migrant Book, particularly for domestic migrant workers sent to Singapore. The book integrates contextual vocabulary organized by workplace scenarios in domestic employment, basic grammar patterns presented through practical dialogues, and real-case images that anchor meaning visually for learners with limited literacy in English. The e-book format makes the material accessible on smartphones, enabling self-study beyond LPK training hours. This study was conducted at a center that serves as a primary training center for prospective IMWs bound for Singapore.

1.2 Research Questions

Based on the background mentioned above, the problem formulation related to this research was:

1. How is the process of designing the “Smart Migrant Book” as an English learning resource for prospective Indonesian Migrant Workers destined for Singapore?
2. How do prospective IMW respond to the “Smart Migrant Book” as a tool for preparation overseas deployment?

1.2 Aims of Study

Based on the research questions, this research explored various aspects related to the development of effective learning materials.

1. To design and develop the “Smart Migrant Book”, an English learning resource integrated with a book format that is grounded in the occupational communication needs of prospective Indonesian Migrant Workers.
2. To examine the responses of prospective Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) to the “Smart Migrant Book” as a learning resource for preparing learners for overseas employment.

1.4 Significance of Research

This study is expected to provide both theoretical and practical contribution to the development of English language learning, particularly within the field of English for Occupational Purposes (EOP). Theoretically, this study emphasizes the importance of needs-based material development that aligns with learners’ specific occupational contexts, especially for prospective Indonesian migrant workers. These studies highlight that effective instructional materials should be contextual, relevant, and responsive to learners’ real-life communication demands. In addition, cognitive theory of multimedia learning supports the integration of visual and interactive elements, suggesting that learners achieve better comprehension and retention when verbal and visual information are meaningfully combined. Therefore, this study extends existing EOP material design research by focusing specifically on the Singapore domestic-work context, integrating contextualized vocabulary, and visual-based learning to enhance

language acquisition among learners with limited time and varied educational backgrounds.

Practically, this study aims to produce an English learning book that offers value to three main audiences. First, for learners, particularly prospective Indonesian migrant workers, the book provides accessible and relevant materials, including daily vocabulary and sentences tailored to their future work environments, enabling them to communicate more effectively in real-life situations. Second, for LPK (training center) instructors, this book serves as a structured and practical teaching resource that can support more focused and efficient instruction within limited training periods. Third, for policymakers, including BP2MI, this study offers a model of instructional material that can be adopted or adapted to improve the quality of pre-departure training programs. By addressing the needs of these three groups, the learning book is expected to contribute to improving both the effectiveness of English training and the overall preparedness of Indonesian migrant workers.

1.5 Output

The primary output of this study is the “Smart Migrant Book” an English learning book specifically designed for prospective Indonesian Migrant Workers (IMWs) preparing to work as domestic workers in Singapore. The book was developed based on a needs analysis conducted with prospective IMWs and training stakeholders to ensure that the content reflects authentic workplace communication situations. The book consists of seven thematic units: *Greetings and Self-Introduction*, *Household Items and Room Vocabulary*, *Cleaning and Household Tasks*, *Cooking and Kitchen Instructions*, *Caring for Children and Elderly Employers*, *Understanding and Following Employer Instructions*, and *Emergency Expressions and Daily Communication*. Each unit includes learning objectives, contextualized dialogues, language expressions, guided practice activities, and review exercises designed to reinforce language acquisition.

A distinctive feature of the **Smart Migrant Book** is its integration of audio support based on the principle of triple coding, combining text, visual images, and audio input to enhance comprehension and retention among low-proficiency learners. Audio materials are accessed by scanning QR codes. The audio support includes vocabulary pronunciation, dialogue recordings, listening practice, and repetition drills that allow learners to practice independently outside the classroom. This feature is intended to improve pronunciation accuracy, listening comprehension, and communicative confidence while providing additional learning support for learners with limited prior exposure to English. The finalized product is intended for use as both a classroom learning resource during pre-departure training and a self-study reference for prospective IMWs. Following expert validation, stakeholder evaluation, and field testing, the **Smart Migrant Book** is expected to serve as a practical and contextually relevant English learning resource for LPKS Nur Mutiara Bangsa and other training institutions preparing Indonesian migrant workers for employment in Singapore's domestic work.