

EMPOWERING LABOR: ADOPTING SINGAPORE'S WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INNOVATIONS TO ENHANCE INDONESIA'S LABOR QUALITY

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Abstract

Global economic growth is significantly influenced by international trade. International trade enables countries to acquire goods and services that are not locally available or that can be produced more efficiently by other nations. Additionally, this activity provides opportunities for countries to expand their market share and increase revenue from exports, while adhering to the laws governing international trade. The purpose of this research is to analyze the workforce development innovations in Singapore so that Indonesia can improve the quality of its labor force and, in turn, enhance its international trade performance. Given that Indonesia is one of the active participants in international trade, this study aims to explore how adopting such innovations can improve Indonesia's trade outcomes. The research method used is qualitative, gathering data from secondary sources such as articles, books, previous research, news, journals, and reliable websites. However, Indonesia has yet to fully address this issue, as there are still several supporting aspects that need improvement in order to boost international trade. Indonesia, with one of the largest populations in ASEAN, should be capable of producing a more skilled workforce. This potential, however, has not been fully harnessed, resulting in Indonesia trailing behind other nations in international trade, such as Singapore. Singapore's international trade is much larger than Indonesia's. In 2021, Singapore's exports reached 11.634.10 million US dollars, while Indonesia's exports were only 231.609 million US dollars. This disparity is largely due to factors such as the quality and capability of human resources in these countries. To improve workforce quality, Singapore has implemented several strategies focusing on skill development, wage improvement, creating an inclusive work environment, and enhancing economic resilience. This study provides an analysis of the efforts made by Singapore, with recommendations for Indonesia to implement similar initiatives to enhance human resources. By maximizing the potential of the available workforce, Indonesia can reduce unemployment and, consequently, improve its international trade performance.

Keywords: international trade; labor quality; development

1. Introduction

The development or even advancement of a country can be measured through several characteristics, one of which includes economic growth and per capita income of the country. In this case, the rapidly growing and uncontrolled globalization era is not only able to bring opportunities, but also brings challenges for individuals, organizations, and countries. Therefore, adaptive adjustments are needed to minimize the possibility of future threats. The existence of globalization encourages countries to carry out international trade activities which are also very influential for global economic growth. International trade aims to improve a country's standard of living (Suryanto & Kurniati, 2022). In general, international trade is the buying and selling of goods or services between different countries, which involves currency conversion and cross-border transactions. International trade, which is one of the important elements of the globalization process, has grown drastically over the years, due to cooperation by various countries in creating policies that are able to support these activities. International trade gives countries access to goods and services that are not available locally or that can be produced more efficiently by other countries (Nikmah et al., 2024). However, many challenges are faced in international trade activities, resulting in many countries failing to benefit from such trade (Suryanto & Kurniati, 2022).

Indonesia is one of the countries that actively participates in international trade activities. Abundant natural resources make Indonesia able to help meet the needs of other countries that require imports of natural resource supplies. However, international trade carried out by Indonesia is still not optimal because it must pass through several challenges, such as different exchange rates because each country has its own currency, where each currency has a fluctuating nature that depends on market mechanisms considering that Indonesia's currency is lower than Singapore, especially since Indonesia's currency is classified as one of the lowest currencies in the world (Risawati, 2023). The challenge of international trade also lies in its international economic policy, where every country including Indonesia and Singapore has a policy of limiting the number of imports. In addition, human resources can also be an obstacle to international trade, if the quality of the workforce is not optimal then it can certainly be a challenge for the country.

Singapore is one of the countries in Southeast Asia with a small area, but its economy can be said to be more advanced than some of its neighbors. Its strategic location at the tip of the Malaysian Peninsula and separated by the Johor Strait supports the country's international trade activities (Fikriansyah, 2023). Indonesia and Singapore have a fairly close bilateral relationship that has been established for a long time. The two countries have established various cooperation in various fields such as in the fields of economy and trade, health, politics, tourism, education and culture, women's empowerment, maritime, energy, air services, defense and security, child protection, science and technology, and also in human resource development. Singapore's high international trade is also motivated by the country's readiness to face the integration of the ASEAN Economic Community. In addition to having a high educational background, Singapore's workforce has a high level of skills and managerial skills. This makes Singapore's workforce more prepared to compete compared to workers from other ASEAN countries. Meanwhile, in Indonesia, the current labor problems include a high unemployment rate, low quality of human resources and labor productivity, lack of skills, low quality of education, and inadequate protection of labor (Utomo, 2020). Indonesia, which has the highest population in the ASEAN region, should be able to create many qualified workforce if supported by good supply facilities. But in reality, Indonesia still has a high unemployment rate. Many college graduates still have difficulty finding jobs, due to several factors such as lack of skill and education. This is because Indonesia is still not aggressively conducting job training as a provision for the workforce. Meanwhile, Singapore has long been aggressively implementing several strategies that focus on skill development, improving wages, creating an

inclusive work environment, and improving economic defense. These facilities are aimed at improving the quality and capability of Singapore's workforce.

This research is important to conduct, because it finds an urgency for Indonesia to immediately improve its workforce development facilities in order to maximize international trade. By adopting practices from Singapore's workforce development innovations, Indonesia can enhance the quality of labor and improve international trade outcomes. This study aims to identify strategies that can be adapted to significantly improve Indonesia's labor quality.

2. Literature Review

2.1. International Trade

In general, international trade is the buying and selling of goods and the buying and selling of services between different countries, involving currency conversion and cross-border transactions. Etymologically, trade includes all activities of buying and selling goods or services in a region, where there is a balance between the demand and supply curves at a point known as the equilibrium point. Meanwhile, international refers to a broad and global scope, rather than being limited to one particular region. Therefore, international trade can be defined as a series of buying and selling transactions between buyers and sellers (in this case, between one country and another through exports and imports) in a market, with the aim of achieving maximum profit for both parties (Rusydziana, 2023).

Historically, theories about international trade, including export and import activities between regions or countries, began with the theory of absolute advantage and comparative advantage (Ibrahim & Halkam, 2021). Conceptually, international trade is a transaction process that is carried out voluntarily by both parties, without coercion. Both parties earn benefit from this trade activity (Dietz, 2014). In other words, international trade occurs because a country's needs or the needs of its citizens cannot be met by commodities from the country itself, where the country is unable to produce a particular commodity. International trade aims to contribute to the efficient allocation of resources (Schumacher, 2013), and stimulate a country's economic growth. In addition, each party hopes to benefit from these trade activities (Salvatore, 2020). A few hundred years ago, the Mercantilist school assumed that international trade was a win-lose deal. In this view, exports were considered a win and imports were considered a loss, so countries should focus on increasing exports and avoiding imports. However, since the early 19th century, market economists began to argue otherwise. They stated that international trade is a win-win deal (Rusydziana, 2018). Conducting international trade certainly has goals and benefits, such as (1) getting commodities that have not been obtained, (2) getting additional foreign exchange, (3) increasing the country's economic growth, (4) meeting the needs of its own country and other countries, (5) expanding the market, (6) establishing good relations with many countries, (7) can reduce unemployment, (8) creating jobs, (9) can stabilize market prices, (10) can exchange science and technology.

2.2. Labor

Labor can be defined as the entire population that is considered capable and willing to work to produce goods or services for both personal and state needs, but labor may not have the opportunity to get a job if there is no demand. The age of labor that is ready to do work, namely 15-65 years (Soleh, 2017). According to Mulyadi (2003), classical theory argues that humans are the main production factor that determines the prosperity of a nation. This is because natural resources (land) will have no meaning without human resources who are able to process them into something useful. In this context, Adam Smith (1729-1790) in his classical theory also emphasized that effective allocation of human resources is the initial key to economic growth. Labor has an influence on work skills and productivity. A qualified workforce can help accelerate and facilitate the running of a country's economic development and the country has

the strength to be able to compete with other countries, which is where labor is one of the most important things in international trade activities.

3. Material and Method

3.1. Design Study

This study employs a comparative qualitative research approach to analyze and draw parallels between the empowering labor system of Singapore and Indonesia. Goal of this study is identifying key innovations that could enhance the quality of labor in Indonesia. This research began with the collection of international trade and unemployment rate data from both countries. The data was sourced based on governmental reports, websites, and recent academic studies. A comprehensive literature review was conducted to explore existing research on the empowering labor system of Singapore. Comparative analysis is used where the data and insights from the literature review were systematically compared to identify Singapore's strategies to develop their labor quality. The findings from the comparative analysis and qualitative evaluations were synthesized into actionable recommendations, aimed at guiding the adaptation and implementation of Singapore empowering labor innovation in Indonesia to improve the quality of its workforces.

4. Result

Here is the export and import data of Singapore from 2021 to 2023 provided by BPS (Million US\$):

Singapore's International Trade	2021	2022	2023
Export	11.634,10	14.349,50	12.607,20
Import	15.451,70	19.409,20	18.409,60

Sumber: (BPS, 2024)

And here is the export and import data of Indonesia from 2021 to 2023 provided by BPS (Million US\$):

Indonesia's International Trade	2021	2022	2023
Export	231,609.5	291.904.3	258,774.3
Import	196,190.0	237,447.1	221,886.2

Sumber: (BPS, 2024)

It can be seen from the data that international trade between Singapore and Indonesia is both fluctuating, but Singapore's export and import figures are much larger than those of Indonesia. Singapore's exports and imports have reached millions, while Indonesia's are still in the hundreds of thousands.

In the era of a knowledge-based economy, the role of human resources has become more important because it has a direct relationship with labor productivity and contributes positively to the economy (Yeisa, 2020). If the number of workers used to produce a commodity increases, the total production of a country will also rise, which will subsequently lead to an increase in total international trade. Conversely, if the number of workers decreases, the production of a country will decline, which will then cause a reduction in total international trade (Fauzi & Widianita, 2024). Therefore, the ability of the workforce is believed to help shape the structure and evolution of the economy. The accumulation and recombination of knowledge possessed by the workforce can create new ideas and improve productivity and product quality. In the broader macroeconomic context, a higher quality labor force can drive entrepreneurship and innovation, which lead to higher growth rates (Ali et al., 2018).

Unemployment Rate	2021	2022	2023
Singapore	4.64%	3.59%	3.47%
Indonesia	6.49%	5.86%	5.32%

Sumber: (Satudata Kementan & Macrotrends, 2024)

It can be seen from the data presented above that the unemployment rates in both Singapore and Indonesia have decreased and improved each year since 2021. The high unemployment rates in both countries in 2021 were one of the impacts of the global economic crisis caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. However, although both countries have gradually improved, the unemployment rate in Indonesia is still higher than in Singapore.

The fundamental issue with Indonesia's labor conditions is the high number of workers facing limited job opportunities. The labor situation in Indonesia can be viewed positively, as the country possesses abundant natural and human resources. Indonesia ranks fourth in terms of population globally, giving it strong performance within the East Asia-Pacific region (Wijayanto & Ode, 2021). This is supported by sustained economic growth, a favorable economic environment, and rapid development in the service sector. The combination of these factors contributes to increased job opportunities and improved labor quality in Indonesia. However, it is unfortunate that, in reality, the majority of the workforce in Indonesia may not have access to employment opportunities due to a lack of demand for labor. This leads to Indonesia having a relatively high unemployment rate within the ASEAN region. Unemployment remains a major concern and a persistent issue in every country worldwide, especially in Indonesia due to the large population and workforce. This challenge affects economic and social stability because when unemployment rates rise, workers lack income and are pushed closer to poverty. Unemployment is caused by an oversupply of labor, while the number of available jobs is limited. Additionally, unemployment is driven by various other factors, such as unstable economic conditions, government policies that do not benefit the people, failures in developing the economic sector, low levels of education and skills, limited job opportunities, a mismatch between workers' competencies and market needs, difficulty accessing job opportunities, and the strong influence of local culture, which can restrict employment opportunities for men or women (Ishak, 2019).

The phenomenon of unemployment is closely linked to layoffs (PHK), which can result from business closures or downsizing due to economic crises, regulations that hinder investment, or issues in export-import processes. The limited availability of jobs in Indonesia has been increasing year by year, serving as a significant indicator of societal welfare and the

success of education in reducing poverty. The social impact of unemployment can be substantial, including a rise in crime rates driven by economic pressures. Given the complexity of this issue, solutions must be multidimensional and not solely limited to educational policies. Unemployment can trigger other social problems and lead to reduced social productivity, which, in turn, impacts community income levels. Therefore, employment issues pose a serious challenge to human resource development, and the ongoing economic crisis has further exacerbated this situation.

Indonesia has a remarkably low rate of workforce training compared to the East Asia-Pacific regional average, which stands at 35%. The Minister of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia revealed that fewer than 8% of companies provide training for their employees. Workforce training is a crucial step in addressing the lack of skills and productivity among workers, as well as enhancing their intellectual competencies. In the era of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, where manual labor is increasingly being replaced by technological systems, the lack of training poses a significant threat. Workers without specialized skills are more vulnerable to being displaced by technology, potentially contributing to higher unemployment rates. The Indonesian government has made efforts to reduce unemployment and improve human resources by offering quality education. However, this approach alone cannot entirely overcome these challenges, as not all citizens can afford to complete a minimum of 12 years of education. Furthermore, even highly educated workers who graduate from reputable universities are not guaranteed to be free from the risk of unemployment. This issue often arises from a lack of specialized skills or previous experience gained through specific training programs.

Singapore has consistently prioritized the development of a future-ready workforce, ensuring that its people and businesses thrive in an increasingly competitive environment. The country has implemented various strategies to enhance the quality and capabilities of its labor force, focusing on skill development, wage improvement, and the creation of a conducive work environment. One notable initiative for workforce skill development in Singapore is the SkillsFuture platform. SkillsFuture, a national movement promoted by the Singaporean government, is committed to providing a comprehensive system for education, training, and career development. This program encourages workers to advance based on their skills rather than solely relying on formal qualifications, aiming to maximize their job performance and adaptability. SkillsFuture courses are fee-based, but all Singaporean citizens aged 25 and above are given a \$500 credit balance to select and enroll in courses of their choice. This initiative empowers individuals to continuously upskill and remain competitive in the job market (SkillsFuture, 2024a).

SkillsFuture recently launched a new program called the SkillsFuture Level-Up Programme. This program is designed for Singaporean citizens aged 40 and above to update and enhance their skills to stay relevant during periods of economic change. As part of this initiative, Singaporeans aged 40 and above are provided with a \$4,000 credit balance that can be used to enroll in over 7,000 upskilling and reskilling courses (SkillsFuture, 2024). This effort also supports workers who have lost their jobs by helping them acquire new skills, thereby facilitating their job search process (Tan, 2023). Additionally, SkillsFuture plans to introduce a Job Seeker Support Scheme, which will offer temporary financial assistance of up to \$6,000 for Singaporean workers aged 21 and above affected by workforce reductions, business closures, layoffs, or terminations due to illness, injury, or accidents (SkillsFuture, 2024).

Singapore, through the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) and the Ministry of Trade and Industry (MTI), provides assistance to workers who have lost their jobs, helping them find new employment opportunities. MOM and MTI have developed empowerment pillars encompassing three key areas, such as (1) creating more opportunities and ensuring stronger lifetime security by offering quality jobs for Singaporeans and providing them with

opportunities to grow, regardless of their talent or background, (2) empowering Singaporeans to take responsibility for and enhance their career health by investing in lifelong learning and taking proactive steps to achieve long-term career goals, (3) strengthening support to help workers recover from setbacks, such as offering aid to displaced workers and assisting them in finding suitable new opportunities. This multi-pronged approach ensures that Singaporean workers are supported in navigating challenges and maintaining resilience in an evolving economic landscape (Manpower, 2022).

Singapore also has The Progressive Wage Model (PWM) which was introduced in 2012. PWM is a significant initiative aimed at enhancing the wages of lower-wage workers (LWW) in Singapore. This model was established through a tripartite partnership involving the government, labor unions, and employers, reflecting a collaborative approach to improving worker welfare. Initially implemented in sectors such as cleaning, security, and landscaping, the PWM has since expanded to include additional sectors like retail and food services, benefiting over 85,000 workers. The model focuses on upgrading skills and boosting productivity as key strategies for wage enhancement. In addition to the PWM, various support measures have been introduced to further assist lower-wage workers. These include income supplementation schemes, training opportunities, improvements to working environments, and protections for employment rights. Collectively, these initiatives aim to create a more sustainable and equitable labor market, ensuring that lower-wage workers can improve their living standards and contribute effectively to the economy.

The Progressive Wage Model (PWM) aims to help improve workers' wages by enhancing their skills and productivity, emphasizing that workforce skill development and productivity growth are directly linked to wage increases. This was evident in 2019 when Singapore experienced an average wage growth of 4%, driven by strong economic growth and a tight labor market. However, in 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic had a detrimental impact on wage growth. The government introduced the Jobs Support Scheme (JSS) to mitigate this impact and support recovery. As the economy began to recover in 2021, wage growth resumed but varied across industries, depending on the sector and global economic conditions (Timecamp, 2023). In 2022, workers in Singapore saw a 3.8% salary increase, reflecting ongoing economic recovery following the Covid-19 pandemic (Chiang, 2022). By 2024, nominal salary growth is expected to reach 4.0%, consistent with 2023 levels (Jenny, 2023). This projection highlights the stability of Singapore's economic and labor market conditions and reflects optimism about continued growth.

5. Discussion

The result of this paper shows that although both countries actively participate in international trade, Singapore's export figures are significantly higher than Indonesia's. This is due to Indonesia still facing several challenges, one of which is labor-related issues. Labor plays a crucial role in international trade, making the quality of the workforce involved a priority to strengthen Indonesia's position in international trade. However, when examining the potential workforce in Indonesia, it lacks proper skill and productivity quality capital. The labor capital required includes all forms of investment made to enhance workforce skills, including formal education, informal education, workplace training, and learning through experience.

In contrast, Indonesia has yet to prioritize efforts to improve the quality and productivity of its workforce, unlike Singapore, which is highly proactive in enhancing its workforce quality and productivity, strongly supported by its government. Moreover, the unemployment rate in Indonesia is significantly higher than in Singapore. This indicates that Indonesia's efforts to develop the quality and capabilities of its workforce remain insufficient. If Indonesia were to maximize such efforts, the country could produce a highly competent workforce capable of

competing both in the domestic and international job markets. Indonesia also has a remarkably low workforce training rate compared to the East Asia-Pacific regional average, which stands at 35%. According to a survey by the Minister of Manpower of the Republic of Indonesia, less than 8% of companies provide training for their employees.

Meanwhile, Singapore has undertaken various efforts to develop and prepare its workforce, one of which is through SkillsFuture, which provides thousands of courses related to upskilling and reskilling accessible to all Singaporean workers. While these courses are fee-based, the Singaporean government offers credit assistance to participants that can be used to enroll in various programs. By observing Singapore's initiatives to enhance skills and productivity to boost trade development, compete in the global market, and reduce unemployment, Indonesia should begin to prioritize similar efforts. This would help advance Indonesia's international trade and strengthen its position in the global economy.

6. Conclusion, Implication, and Recommendation

This research explores the potential of adopting Singapore's workforce development innovations to improve the quality of labor in Indonesia. It reveals that there are several innovations made by Singapore that can significantly contribute to improving the quality of Indonesian labor. This study also discusses how Indonesia can enhance its workforce quality by adopting the workforce development innovations that Singapore has successfully implemented, as efforts to improve skill levels and productivity, while reducing the still high unemployment rate.

Policy recommendations adopted from Singapore's innovations include developing lifelong learning initiatives to encourage individuals to pursue further education throughout their careers, creating incentives for companies to invest in employee training, and fostering partnerships between the government and private sector to enhance curriculum development. As a suggestion, in addition to improving workforce readiness facilities, strong labor-related regulations are also needed, such as laws ensuring fair wages, transparency in recruitment procedures, and transparency in termination processes, all of which are essential to creating a healthy work environment.

By adopting that, Indonesia has a great opportunity to improve the quality of the labor and be able to face economic challenges that grow everyday, alongside globalization. The implementation of these recommendations is expected to have a positive impact on the quality of labor, and strengthen the competitiveness of Indonesian labor so they could fit in the global market.

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