



International Journal of Public Health and Nursing (IJPHN)

ISSN: 3070-202X (ONLINE)

VOLUME 2 ISSUE 2 (2026)



PUBLISHED BY
E-PALLI PUBLISHERS, DELAWARE, USA

Clinical Experiences of International Nursing Students in the Philippines: A Phenomenological Perspective

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Article Information

Received: July 18, 2026

Accepted: September 25, 2026

Published: October 13, 2026

Keywords

Clinical Performance, Lived Experiences, Nursing Education

ABSTRACT

International Nursing Students who undergo clinical training in the Philippines face a range of complex lived experiences that remain poorly understood and underrepresented in existing literature. While the Philippines has become an increasingly popular destination for international nursing education due to its globally recognized nursing programs and affordability, little to none qualitative research has documented the actual clinical realities these international Nursing students encounter within Philippine hospital and classroom settings. This study aimed to uncover the lived experiences, challenges, and personal growth encountered by international nursing students during their clinical training in Philippine hospitals. The study used a transcendental phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with selected international nursing students who completed clinical placements in various hospital settings across the Philippines. There were 14 participants, of whom 13 were females and 1 male. From the interviews, the data were analyzed to identify 16 major themes from three research questions which include, Family Influence and Connections, Financial and Sponsorship Support, Academic Opportunities and Quality of Education, Affordability and Feasibility, Perceived Global Value of Philippine Nursing, Language Barriers and Translation Dependency, Psychosocial Strain and Embodied Stress, Identity, Belonging, and Discrimination, Support Systems and Community Buffers, Growth, Adaptability, and Professional Identity Formation, Academic and Clinical Workload and Pace, Professional Growth and Competence Development, Advocacy, Leadership, and Healthcare Improvement, Cultural Adaptability and Global Competence, Faith-Driven Orientation Toward the Future, and Mentorship and Giving Back. The findings shed light on the emotional, social, and academic challenges these students face and the coping mechanisms they employ. Summary of the results This study contributes valuable insights for nursing educators, institutions, and hospital administrators to enhance the international nursing education experience and foster a more inclusive and supportive environment for foreign nursing students in the Philippines.

INTRODUCTION

International students leave their home countries to pursue educational opportunities abroad. Some engage in distance education to earn degrees without relocating, while others travel internationally for secondary and tertiary educational experiences and qualifications. International students contribute diversity to university environments, and their experiences significantly influence educational outcomes and institutional development. Research has demonstrated that institutions can create supportive environments that facilitate adaptation to diverse learning contexts and styles, thereby enhancing the overall student experience ¹.

The increase in international students in the Philippines has resulted from strategic marketing initiatives promoting the country as an educational hub in Asia. According to Bureau of Immigration, this growth reflects the government's success in building trust in the Philippine educational system rather than any administrative irregularities ². This trend aligns with global patterns, as UNESCO data indicate that the number of internationally mobile students has increased significantly over the past

two decades. In 2011, approximately 2.2 million students studied abroad; by 2021, this number had grown to more than 3.8 million, demonstrating resilience despite COVID-19 pandemic related mobility restrictions ³. According to Weber and Van Mol (2023), growth in international student migration coincides with trends concerning the internationalization of higher education, which have been gaining prominence over the last few decades, as well as societal developments such as the rise of the middle class in many non-western countries such as China and India, whereby international student migration (ISM) can form a strategy of social distinction ⁴.

Despite these trends, relatively little theoretically grounded empirical research exists on the macro-level determinants of international student migration compared to studies examining individual-level decision-making processes. Furthermore, few studies have considered the development levels of host and origin countries, despite extensive discussion of the development-migration link in other areas of migration studies ⁵. Notably, literature addressing the hospital-based clinical experiences of

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international Asian nursing students pursuing nursing education in the Philippines remains particularly scarce. The gap identified in research has implications similar to those found in the literature. Clinical experiences greatly influence on student's professional growth throughout the educational process, help students develop cultural competency, and ultimately shape their future career trajectory. Gaining insight into what international nursing students' perceptions and experiences are of engaging in clinical education in the Philippines can lead to improvements to educational support systems, improvements to the implementation of culturally responsive pedagogy, and improvements to support for student well-being. Additionally, exploring these clinical experiences will aid in the dialogue addressing internationalization in nursing education, specifically around the preparation of globally competent nursing students. This study aimed to investigate how international nursing students experience clinical education in the Philippines to determine how they interpret their educational and professional experiences.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research Design

The research used a qualitative transcendental phenomenological design to investigate the lived experiences of international nursing students in the Philippines. Transcendental Phenomenology is the method of describing the essence of what it is like to have an experience related to a common experience, based on detailed accounts of the experience and how it was experienced by each of the subjects. This methodology was chosen in order to provide an in-depth understanding of international nursing students' educational and clinical experiences through minimizing researcher bias using epoché and bracketing 7.

Study Setting and Participants

The research took place at three faith based Universities in the Philippines that were private higher learning institutions affiliated with hospitals and offered bachelors of science in nursing (BSN) with placement for clinical experience in the hospitals. The sample included international nursing students who were taking their third and fourth level nursing classes and were currently on clinical rotation during the second semester of their academic school year, at the time of the study.

Participants were purposefully sampled for the study, and the sample included 14 international nursing students from Indonesia, Myanmar, USA, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Solomon Islands, Cameroon, Uganda, and Nepal. The ages of the subjects were 20-29, with the majority of subjects being female. The data reached saturation after ten interviews, and four additional interviews were conducted to validate the themes.

Eligibility Criteria

Participants must be international nursing students

currently enrolled at one of 3 faith-based private higher education institutions in the Philippines and currently assigned to a hospital for clinical practice (hospital rotation). Publicly enrolled students, first and second year nursing students; dual citizens; and students not actively participating in clinical duties during the period of the study were excluded from participating.

Data Collection Procedure

Using a semi-structured interviewing method based on the Moustakas phenomenological model, data were collected from nursing students studying in the Philippines, specifically on their motivations to be a nurse, what the experience has been like to be an international nursing student, and their perception of their future professional identity.

Interviews were conducted face-to-face at the university or as close to the participant's convenience as possible (only 5 of the interviews were conducted via the internet or using a Zoom/Messenger platform). All participants attended an orientation session prior to being interviewed to understand the purpose, processes, risks, and confidentiality safeguards of study; written consent was obtained from each participant before being interviewed. Each participant's demographic information was collected through a short demographic survey. All audio-recordings of the interviews were made with the permission of the participants. Field notes were taken during the interview (to document context and non-verbal cues), and these were then verified with a research assistant who had signed a confidentiality agreement before being allowed to assist in the study.

A pilot interview (July, 2025) was completed with one participant prior to the start of data collection to ensure the interview questions were clearly understood, to evaluate the methods of recording and transcription, and to identify areas that required improvement.

Research Instrument

Questions for the semi-structured interviews were developed using Moustakas' phenomenological interview framework, as a guide for generating rich descriptions of the lived experiences of the participants 8. The questions covered topics such as how participants became interested in pursuing international nursing education, their experiences in clinical learning environments located in the Philippines, their social and emotional experiences, how they feel they have changed as people since beginning their studies in nursing, and what their aspirations are for after graduating with a degree in nursing.

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis conducted according to Braun and Clarke's (2006) data analysis process. The data consisted of verbatim transcriptions of the interviews, and these transcripts were reviewed repeatedly to achieve familiarization with the data. Initial codes were inductively developed based on segments of data that

contained meaning before categorizing the codes into general categories and themes were reviewed, revised, and defined so that they aligned with the goals of the research study.

There are 6 phases involved in the thematic analysis: familiarization with the data; developing initial codes; generating themes from these initial codes; reviewing themes to ensure they match with the objectives of the study; defining and naming themes; and producing a report about the findings 9. NVivo version 15 and the NVivo AI assistant were used for the purpose of organizing the transcripts, comparing patterns of coding, revising the thematic organization, and enhancing the transparency of the analytic process. The initial coding was done manually to ensure that reflexivity was maintained with the participants' narratives prior to bringing the codes into NVivo for systematic analysis. An inductive approach to analysis was used to allow the themes to develop through the participants' experiences and not with predetermined assumptions 10.

Trustworthiness and Reflexivity

The researchers defined trustworthiness by using triangulation, member checking, reflexive bracketing, and systematic documentation. Triangulation ensured that data were trustworthy by gathering data, from multiple perspectives, from large numbers of participants across different institutions and multiple geographic areas 11. Member checking occurred while transcripts were created and during the initial analysis of transcripts by ensuring that questionable statements were followed-up with participants and opportunities for participants to provide feedback on meanings attributed to data 12.

Reflexive bracketing procedures were used to limit any personal biases that may arise from characteristics of the researcher and provide assurance of rigor in the analytic process performed by the researcher. During

the data collection phase, reflective memos documenting decisions, processes, feelings related to methodology, or emotional reactions were utilized. In addition, the researchers used bracketing discussions with colleagues external to the study, in order to enhance their reflexivity and limit the researcher preconceptions 12.

Ethical Considerations

The study underwent ethical review and was approved by the Adventist University of the Philippines Ethics Review Board with ERB Case Code 2025-1565 prior to data collection. Before the interview participants voluntarily signed the informed consent form and were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study, and psychological support services were made available when necessary.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Sociodemographic Characteristics of the Participants

There were fourteen (14) international nursing students who participated in the study. The participants came from different countries including Myanmar, Solomon Islands, Indonesia, USA, Kenya, Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Zimbabwe, Cameroon, Uganda, and Nepal. The ages of the participants ranged from 20–29 years old, with the majority of participants being between 21–22 years old. Most of the participants were female (92.9%), while only one participant was male (7.1%). Participants were enrolled in third- and fourth-year nursing programs and were actively engaged in hospital clinical rotations during the time of the study. The diversity of participants provided rich descriptions regarding the lived experiences of international nursing students undertaking clinical education in the Philippines.

Factors Leading Young Adults to Become

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Participants

Participant Code	Year Level	Country	Age	Gender
12	4	Indonesia	21	Female
3	4	Myanmar	23	Female
2	4	USA	24	Female
6	4	Kenya	25	Female
14	3	Congo/DRC	21	Female
8	3	Rwanda	21	Female
1	3	Zimbabwe	22	Female
5	3	Myanmar	21	Male
11	3	Solomon Islands	29	Female
13	3	Myanmar	21	Female
10	3	Solomon Islands	26	Female
7	4	Cameroon	27	Female
9	3	Uganda	20	Female
4	4	Nepal	22	Female

International Nursing Students in the Philippines

To address the first research question, participants identified five overarching themes that influenced their decision to pursue nursing education in the Philippines.

These themes, together with their corresponding sub-themes and supporting participant statements, are presented in Table 2.

Family Influence and Connections

Table 2: Factors That Led Young Adults to Become International Nursing Students in the Philippines

Theme	Sub-theme	Significant Statements
Family Influence and Connections	Parental Decision	"It was my parents' choice... they chose the school and country." (P13) "My mother came to the Philippines to study, and I was so little that she had no choice then to bring me along." (P8)
	Alumni Pathway	"My mother and siblings also graduated from this institution." (P12) "My dad had a friend who recommended that if my sister and I are interested in nursing school, we can come to the Philippines to study." (P2)
Financial and Sponsorship Support	Government Sponsorship	"My government did the research, and those responsible for the sponsorship brought me here." (P11)
	Third-Party and Religious Networks	"My sponsors are Filipino... they wanted me to study here." (P4) "It was introduced to me by a family friend from the general conference." (P14)
Academic Opportunities and Quality of Education	Program Strength and Global Recognition	"The country's strong reputation, quality programs, and global demand for Filipino nurses." (P5) "Father's admiration of the Philippine education system." (P10)
	Diverse Clinical Experience	"Unable to study in the home country, chose the Philippines for its strong nursing program." (P3)
Affordability and Feasibility	Cost-Effectiveness	"The relatively affordable cost of living and tuition allowed me to pursue my dreams without significant financial pressure." (P7) "I chose the Philippines because it was cheaper." (P5)
	Accessibility Compared to Western Alternatives	"My university tuition is affordable compared to the US." (P8) "Knowing that living in the United States is expensive." (P2)
Perceived Global Value of Philippine Nursing	International Mobility and Clinical Readiness	"Filipino nurses are in demand in many countries... and also hands-on learning." (P5)

The influence of family and personal contacts was one of the most frequently mentioned factors. Many participants discussed how the choices their parents made and what their siblings recommended (as well as their links with their parents' friends) dictated the country they would study in and where they would attend school. This family impact (positive or negative) was significant for participants who were first-generation international students, as well as those whose family members had been previous international alumni.

In discussions on choosing to study in the Philippines, several participants indicated the decision was made by their parents and therefore was not entirely theirs. For example, Participant 13's parents made the school and country choice for him, while Participant 12's mother and siblings are all graduates of the same institution, making it a trusted choice. Participant 9's parent established many professional contacts in the Philippines, which enabled the parent to suggest it as a good place to study nursing. Similarly, Participant 8 accompanied his mother (who was in the process of studying) early in his life, thereby being unintentionally immersed in the Philippine educational

setting through family. All of these examples demonstrate the use of family contact to inform decisions on nurses interested in becoming international students in their choice of school and country through the transmission of knowledge through family networks.

Financial and Sponsorship Support

Various forms of financial aid such as government scholarships, third-party sponsorships, support from religious groups and community organizations, serve as major facilitators in obtaining international nursing education for many participants included in the study, and significantly reduce the financial obstacles of studying abroad.

Participant 11 stated that the government did research on how to sponsor the student and how to arrange the placements in the Philippines. Participant 4 told about sponsorship by Filipinos who wanted the student to complete their education in the Philippines, leaving little room for alternative choices. Participant 14 explained the original contact was through a family friend involved with a Christian-based international organisation. These

participant stories clearly show that informal social networks and institutional affiliations intersect to help obtain access to international nursing education for participants who come from a low-income and/or middle-income country.

Academic Opportunities and Quality of Education

Many respondents referred to source references such as mentors, family/communities that endorsed the academic quality of the Philippines as a place to pursue their nursing degree because of the wide variety of clinical experience available to students and the overall global reputation of the Philippines in its ability to prepare its nurses for practice in the United States. Participant 5 cited the strong global reputation and many opportunities for Filipino nurses as an attraction to completing a nursing program in the Philippines; Participant 10 cited how their parent places a high value on the Philippine Educational System; and Participant 3 stated they could not find a nursing program locally that was equivalent to what is available in the Philippines, so they came to the Philippines to obtain a nursing degree based on the strength of the nursing curriculum. This indicates that all respondents to the survey have an understanding, whether correct or not, that nursing education offered by the Philippines is a globally recognized credential and is considered to have high clinical standards. The collective understanding of nursing education from the Philippines indicates that it is a viable alternative for International aspiring nurses.

Affordability and Feasibility

The lower cost of living in the Philippines versus Western countries (the USA and Europe) was a determining practical reason in the decision-making process. Affordability was frequently cited by participants as being a feasible means of pursuing a nursing education that would have otherwise been financially impossible.

Participant 7 reflected on how the cost of living and

tuition was affordable and enabled him/her to pursue his/her academic goals with little financial burden. Participant 8 also stated that tuition in The Philippines was much less expensive than in U.S. colleges and universities. Participant 5 cited cost as the most important reason for choosing The Philippines. All of these comments place affordability not just as a financial incentive but rather as a major factor in opening the door for students from low-income backgrounds to obtain an international nursing degree.

Perceived Global Value of Philippine Nursing

While many of the reasons behind participants' decisions can be explained with short-term financial and/or family considerations, participants reported a more global perspective based on their belief about the international mobility of a nurse with a Philippine degree. Participants identified the international acclaim of Philippine nurses and clinical training in the Philippines as key motivations. Participant 5 reported that a primary factor in their decision-making was the international need for nurses trained in the Philippines and the value of experiential-based training. The perception of being able to use Philippine nursing as a means of achieving international career mobility has clear aspirational aspects that are not solely related to immediate educational opportunities but are related to long-term career opportunities throughout global healthcare systems.

The Lifeworld of International Nursing Students in the Philippines

In response to the second research question, the lived experiences of participants in the Philippine nursing education context were organized into six themes, each comprising two to three sub-themes, as presented in Table 3.

The findings revealed that the international nursing

Table 3: Themes and Sub-themes of the Lifeworld of International Nursing Students in the Philippines

Theme	Sub-theme	Significant Statements
Language Barriers and Translation Dependency	Clinical Communication Gaps	"I don't get to engage with patients fully... I'm usually paired with a Filipino... when they are tired of translating, I still need to rely on them." (P1)
	Classroom Comprehension and Concealing Difficulty	"If the teacher wants to emphasize something, they usually emphasize it in Tagalog... I cannot understand." (P10) "Miscommunication in class and on duty." (P12)
Psychosocial Strain and Embodied Stress	Emotional Toll and Physical Symptoms	"Feelings of loneliness, homesickness, stress, and depression." (P6) "I lost a lot of weight. I was so underweight." (P8)
	Fear of Underperformance	"It's scary to go for duties... because of the language barrier; I could have performed more." (P13) "Depression was one major thing that I experienced here." (P2)
Identity, Belonging, and Discrimination	Othering and Questioning Capability	"During class groupings... I felt left out because I'm a foreigner." (P13) "Sometimes they feel like I am not capable... I will try to prove myself." (P12)

	Hospitality, Safety, and Resilience	"One thing I will never forget... how hospitable and nice the people are... and how safe the country is." (P9) "Teamwork and compassion." (P9)
Support Systems and Community Buffers	Compassionate Clinical Instructors	"My clinical instructor insisted I take her food." (P10) "My teacher always reminds me that making an error doesn't mean I am not smart." (P5)
	Peer Helpers and Faith Communities	"Batch mates are always willing to be my translator." (P5) "AFCON Sabbaths... home far from home... I'm not alone." (P1)
Growth, Adaptability, and Professional Identity Formation	Emotional Resilience and Independence	"Even though I'm crying... I know it is helping me grow." (P13) "No one's going to cook or wake you... you have to organize your time." (P11)
	Skill Development and Clinical Competence	"I gained valuable practical skills during my clinical rotations." (P7) "I felt a sense of vitality and determination while participating in hands-on patient care." (P7)
Academic and Clinical Workload and Pace	Heavy Workload and Fast Assessments	"The length of time for the exam is always very short... I get drained." (P7) "I was basically having classes from 7 a.m. to 7 p.m. every day." (P8)
	Positive Reframing of Rigorous Standards	"Very strict with hygiene and time... I take it positively." (P11)

students in the Philippines navigated a complex and overlapping set of academic, linguistic, cultural, and psychosocial experiences that collectively shaped their educational trajectories and emerging professional identities.

Language Barriers and Translation Dependency

Language emerged as the most pervasive and consistently reported challenge across the participant cohort and despite English being the official medium of instruction in Philippine higher education, participants reported frequent use of Tagalog and regional dialects in both classroom and clinical settings, creating persistent communication gaps.

Participant 1 described the difficulty of fully engaging with patients, noting dependence on Filipino peer translators whose availability was neither guaranteed nor consistent:

"I don't get to engage with patients fully... I'm usually paired with a Filipino... when they are tired of translating, I still need to rely on them. (Participant 1)"

The participant known as Participant 10 mentioned a difficulty in an academic setting, because the major concepts were usually emphasized in Tagalog leaving all international students with no access to the explanation. Another participant (Participant 14) recalled an incident where a supervisor gave this participant (a nursing student) instructions on a clinical assignment in Tagalog and afterward realized, because of a language barrier, that they had given this new employee incorrect information since the employee could not speak Tagalog. In addition to these examples of miscommunication, all of the other participants provided similar examples.

However, several of the participants expressed that they

were able to adapt positively to their circumstances. For example, one participant (Participant 10) said that she had learned to recognize common everyday words over time; thus it was gradual informal acquisition of the English language. Although the language barrier created anxiety, embarrassment and dependency on others among the international nursing students, it also prompted them to develop a non-verbal communication style and to develop their cross-cultural competence.

Psychosocial Strain and Embodied Stress

Participants expressed numerous psychosocial and somatic symptoms of stress during their education. Some of these symptoms included feelings of loneliness and home-sickness; depressive-like symptoms; and physical symptoms, including significant weight loss and gastrointestinal disturbance.

Participant 6 shared accounts of feeling lonely, homesick, and stressed out as well as experiencing symptoms of depression, in addition to experiencing fluctuations in their weight and ulcers as physical symptoms. Participant 8 mentioned that they started to lose significant amounts of weight as they adjusted to their new environment. Finally, Participant 2 stated that depression was the biggest challenge they suffered during the education phase and felt that much of the challenge was attributed to the language difficulties in both the academic setting and clinical practice.

"Depression was one major thing that I experienced here... lectures and duties done in Tagalog. (Participant 2)"

Participant 11 detailed a specific anxious episode regarding having to pray publicly out loud and displaying a lack of confidence in how accurately to pronounce words during that event, and participant 13 voiced their fear of going

to clinical placement because they are unsure if they will complete tasks due to language barriers. The sum of both participants' experiences illustrates how the total demands of language/culture, academically, cause a cumulative bio-psychosocial stress profile which negatively impacts learning and well-being.

Identity, Belonging, and Discrimination

The participants' experiences of social inclusion and exclusion varied, based on their respective academic and clinical communities. Although some participants felt excluded from their counterparts, either from marginalisation or 'otherness', they were able to identify instances of hospitality and solidarity to make up for the other instances.

Participant 13 provided an example of how they felt excluded from participating in group activities during class based on their foreign status. Participant 12 described their reluctance to speak in class due to fear of being judged or embarrassed if their responses were wrong. The experiences of marginalisation described by some participants are partially countered by the narratives of others. Participant 9, for example, described the Philippines as a hospitable and safe country and spoke positively about the personal connections made with others during their program as being nurturing. In contrast, Participant 7 highlighted being able to access a sophisticated health care system as one of the benefits of the education they received.

Despite the challenges faced by each participant, the vast majority conveyed resilience in their experiences and retained a positive attitude toward them. Participant 12 also indicated an intention to negate the assumptions others had about their inabilities by using their professional identity as a source of motivation to overcome any form of discrimination.

Support Systems and Community Buffers

Participants identified various sources of support that acted as factors of protection from the psychosocial and academic stressors described above. These sources include the caring behaviours of clinical instructors, practical help from Filipino peers and the spiritual and cultural support from faith-based communities.

Participant 10 described how her clinical instructor shared a personal meal with her to show her inclusion and care. Participant 5 stated that peers are willing to be translators, and that an instructor regularly reinforces the idea that making mistakes is not a reflection of one's intelligence. Participant 7 stated that the collaborations between instructors and classmates helped make difficult academic material more achievable. Participant 1 described how the African Congregation (AFCON) functioned as a critical faith-based community in providing him with a sense of belonging and cultural continuity within a foreign country:

"AFCON Sabbaths... home far from home... I'm not alone. (Participant 1)"

These narratives collectively illustrate how informal and formal support structures function as community buffers that mitigate the adverse effects of language barriers, cultural dislocation, and academic pressure.

Growth, Adaptability, and Professional Identity Formation

Notwithstanding the formidable challenges described participants consistently articulated narratives of personal transformation professional growth, and emerging resilience and Philippine nursing education experience was frequently reframed as a crucible for the development of independence, cultural competence, and clinical confidence.

Participant 13 captured this orientation with notable poignancy, acknowledging that distress was simultaneously a marker of growth. Participant 11 described the development of time management and self-organization skills as a direct consequence of operating independently in a foreign context. Participant 14 described the experience of scrubbing for a Caesarean section as a remarkable clinical milestone despite the persistent challenge of language barriers. Participant 7 articulated a sense of purpose and vitality derived from direct patient care: "I felt a sense of vitality and determination while participating in hands-on patient care. (Participant 7)"

These accounts suggest that the challenges of international nursing education, when navigated with adequate support, contribute to the formation of resilient, culturally competent, and professionally committed nursing practitioners.

Academic and Clinical Workload and Pace

Participants commonly experienced stress and fatigue related to the intensity of the academic curriculum, as well as the concurrent clinical placements they had to fulfil. The large number of academic units that participants were enrolled in (heavy unit loads), compressed timeframes in which to complete examination (compressed exam times), and rigorous demands in time and hygiene management (high standards for hygiene/time management), all consistently contributed to the overall pressures associated with the educational experience.

Participant 8 described carrying 29 academic units while being in class from 7 a.m. until 7 p.m. and reported losing a significant amount of weight as a result of the demands of this schedule. Participant 7 reported feeling chronically drained during exam periods, due to the short timeframes in which assessments were completed. Conversely, Participant 11 adopted a constructively adaptive approach to the rigorous program standards: "Very strict with hygiene and time... I take it positively. (Participant 11)"

This variability in participant responses to workload demands reflects individual differences in coping orientation and prior academic preparation, and underscores the importance of structured support mechanisms for students navigating demanding educational environments in a second-culture context.

International Nursing Students' Perspectives on Their Future

To address the third research question, participants articulated a broadly optimistic and purposeful vision

of their professional futures. Five themes characterizing these future orientations emerged from the data, as presented in Table 4.

Participants demonstrated confidence in their professional

Table 4: How International Nursing Students See Themselves in the Future

Theme	Sub-theme	Significant Statements
Professional Growth and Competence Development	Clinical Competence and Lifelong Learning	"I want to be good at what I do... quick thinking and clinical reasoning." (P12) "My experiences have instilled a strong commitment to lifelong learning." (P7)
	Exposure and Experience	"My perspective expanded greatly... shaping me into a globally competent nurse." (P9) "I got to do many hands-on experiences... especially in our clinical duties." (P5)
Advocacy, Leadership, and Healthcare Improvement	Leadership and Teaching	"Maybe I see myself as a nursing teacher... especially for international nursing students." (P1) "I hope to mentor future nursing students and share my journey." (P7)
	Healthcare Reform and Community Advocacy	"I want to make a change in the nursing system back home." (P10) "I want to help rebuild a healthcare system that serves with fairness and compassion." (P3)
Cultural Adaptability and Global Competence	Cross-Cultural Awareness and Adaptability	"Experiencing different cultures gives me an open mind." (P2) "I see myself adjusting to anything... even if I move to other countries." (P13)
	Global Mobility	"I want to be a travel nurse and explore different parts of the world." (P6) "I see myself somewhere else... some part in the world." (P14)
Faith-Driven Orientation Toward the Future	Surrender to Divine Plan	"The rest of my future is in the hands of God." (P4, P8) "Give my plans to God because he has a bright one for me." (P12)
	Spiritual Guidance and Purpose	"God has a perfect plan for me." (P1) "I envision a future where I am not only a skilled nurse but also a compassionate healthcare leader." (P7)
Mentorship and Giving Back	Peer Mentorship Intent	"I wish to be approachable, kind, and supportive... especially those in my shoes." (P5) "I would like to mentor future international nursing students... I understand how hard transitioning can be." (P6)
	Improving Home Healthcare Systems	"I would like to help... improve healthcare facilities back home." (P11)

trajectories, drawing on their cross-cultural exposure, clinical training, and personal resilience as foundations for envisioning futures characterized by competence, leadership, and service.

Professional Growth and Competence Development

The participants in this study expressed their desire to create a solid foundation of critical thinking skills and an ongoing commitment to lifelong learning throughout their profession. They often identified their time in the Philippines as an important factor in developing both clinical reasoning and clinical competencies necessary for a career in nursing around the world.

One participant said they would like to have a high level of clinical reasoning and quick decision making as the indicators of achieving professional excellence. Another participant conveyed their confidence in being an

accomplished nurse as a result of the knowledge, skills, and significant number of clinical hours experienced throughout the course of their degree. A third participant communicated how their experience in the Philippines gave them a wider view of nursing from a global perspective and helped to develop their ability to practice nursing on an international level. The fourth participant expressed how the experience they had while completing their clinical rotation was directly related to their personal growth and commitment to lifelong learning, yet also mentioned that they had moments of uncertainty, which are typical during professional development.

Advocacy, Leadership, and Healthcare Improvement

One dimension of participant's future orientation that is remarkable is to aspire to be more than an individual clinician; they hoped to move to a position of leadership

in health care, to engage in the development of policies, and to create systems that would be better within the countries where they grew up.

For example, Participant 1 wishes to become a nursing educator who focuses on encouraging international nursing students. Similarly, Participant 7 expressed an intention to be a mentor to others by providing encouragement through positive statements regarding overcoming challenges and maintaining perseverance. In addition, Participant 10 stated that they will work to improve the nursing system in their home country, while Participant 3 explained that they will work toward developing a new equitable and compassionate healthcare system. Furthermore, Participant 11 discussed that they wish to improve the healthcare infrastructure of their home country. The above-mentioned examples of participant's future orientation highlight their view of nursing as a profession that can effect social change and the use of international education as a means of enhancing one's sense of individual and collective responsibility.

Cultural Adaptability and Global Competence

An example of how the participants view their future in nursing is through their hope to become more than just individual clinicians; they want to take on leadership positions within the healthcare system and be involved in developing policies and systems that will improve healthcare in their countries of origin.

One case that embodies this vision is Participant 1, who aspires to educate nursing students from other countries. Participant 7 wants to encourage fellow nurses by mentoring them with positive messages about overcoming difficulties and continuing to work at what they do. Similarly, Participant 10 plans to work toward improving nursing systems in his home country, while Participant 3 wants to create a new healthcare system that is just and compassionate. Finally, Participant 11 expressed an interest in improving his country's healthcare infrastructure. These examples illustrate how some participants view nursing as a conduit for instigating social change as well as modifying their own sense of individual and collective responsibility through the use of global education.

Faith-Driven Orientation Toward the Future

Many of the respondents expressed that their convictions about their religious beliefs heavily influenced their understanding of purpose; provided stability when there was ambiguity; and directed their vocational aspirations toward what they believed to be a divine call.

Participant four and participant eight both noted that their future is "in the hands of the Lord," and the faith that they have is a complete surrender to a sovereign God's plan. Participant twelve expressed that he would pray over any career plans that he had to seek a larger plan that God had established for him, rather than simply follow his own ambitions. Participant fourteen provided a clear theological framing for this perspective

by asserting that God is the "author and finisher of your faith." Participant seven connected this spiritual view with his career aspirations: *"I envision a future where I am not only a skilled nurse but also a compassionate healthcare leader. (Participant 7)"*

These testimonies reflect the integral role of spirituality in sustaining motivation, providing meaning, and shaping the career identities of international nursing students navigating the demands of cross-cultural education.

Mentorship and Giving Back

A commonality among the participants was their desire to give back to their respective communities and to support future international nursing students. Furthermore, they shared a sense of compassion about the difficulties associated with moving into a new educational system.

Participant 6 expressed an interest in mentoring future international nursing students based on her own experiences. Though Participant 5 spoke of wanting to support other people who have had similar experiences with worthy goals of being kind, approachable, and supportive.

Similarly, Participant 7 conveyed a desire to be honest about her own experiences in order to encourage future students' willingness to face challenging situations. Finally, there was a correlation between the theme of mentoring and a greater initiative to improve health care services in their home country; this further illustrates that one's own professional path will impact the health of their fellow citizens.

Discussion

The combination of financial, family, and academic incentives that motivated me to pursue nursing in the Philippines resulted from a convergence of three factors: family networks (parents, alumni, and friends), academic reputation of nursing programs (*the Philippines*), and global demand for nurses trained in the Philippines. An influence on my decision-making process was the pattern of family influence on educational destinations among families that have direct knowledge of the educational landscape and cultural environment in the destination country 13. Additionally, word-of-mouth sources through relational network channels were the primary method of information, consistent with the broader literature that identifies such channels as credible, as they are perceived to be free of commercial motives 14. I viewed the academic reputation of Philippine nursing programs, the large number of available clinical experiences, and the global demand for nurses prepared in the Philippines as strategically important factors influencing my decision to study nursing in the Philippines. Whatley stated that studying overseas has the potential to serve as a source of professional prestige and boost long-term international career opportunities for nurses whose home healthcare systems do not provide considerable opportunities for advancement 13.

Affordability and Sponsorship

Financial reasons were also really important when participants were making an enrollment choice. Financial assistance from many sources- including government scholarship programs, third-party sponsorships, and community-based, faith-based institutions- helped to significantly alleviate the structural challenges to studying abroad. Whatley (2017) said finance is the primary predictor of participation by students from low-income backgrounds in international studies; we support this 13. The affordable nature of Philippine tuition compared to tuition charged at western schools is noted frequently at study's end as a key factor in choosing one study abroad destination instead of another, and the research supports that students with limited financial resources prefer to attend countries that have lower living expenses 14.

Participants in this study reported that language barriers were the most common challenge. Although instruction is in English, participants experienced significant gaps in the ability to communicate with each other due to the use of Tagalog and other regional dialects in both clinical and classroom contexts. Researchers have shown that language barriers create obstacles to being able to communicate with patients in real-time; create difficulties in building relationships between providers and patients; create challenges in being able to understand the material; and increase the number of times a student must rely on their peers in translation 15. In addition, the experience described by participants indicates that they had to rely on their peers for translating, which has consistently been an issue documented in prior studies 15.

Although study participants faced numerous challenges, they were provided with strong support systems, including compassionate instructors, peer translators, and faith-based community networks, that served as valuable protective factors for them. An integrative review of the literature has identified that high levels of resilience correspond to high levels of adequate social support 16. Faculty involvement was consistently cited as a primary institutional resource to promote continued resilience in the clinical setting, corroborated by ongoing research conducted by Quek 17. In addition, the participants' description of professional growth and the development of an identity reflect current frameworks that conceptualize adaptability (i.e., cultural competence, cognitive flexibility, and emotional resilience) as being the primary vehicle for transforming cross-cultural adversity into long-lasting professional assets 15. The academic workload of heavy course schedules and compressed clinical placements described by study participants align with results from umbrella reviews indicating that they contribute to burnout and insufficient mastery of skills 17. The use of competency-based progression frameworks and equity-sensitive workload management strategies (e.g., protecting students from non-educational activities) is recommended 15,18.

Participants described having positive and purposeful aspirations for their future professions that were centered upon clinical competence, leadership, global mobility,

faith, and mentorship, all while aspiring to achieve clinical excellence; an aspiration that is consistent with findings from Sun *et al* (2023) showing that a high degree of confidence and clinical ability is produced by successful cross-cultural adaptation 19.

Limitations of the Study

Due to the phenomenological design and purposive sampling strategy of this study, both of which are suitable for producing rich, contextually relevant qualitative data, findings cannot be generalized to the larger population of international nursing students in the Philippines. Because the study was based solely on self-reported data produced by means of lengthy individual interviews, the results are subject to the influence of social desirability biases and recall biases that can exist because respondents may have either overly emphasized or minimized particular aspects of their experiences. The relatively small sample size of 14 participants, while appropriate in the context of phenomenological research, limits the possible transferability of results to other institutional and national contexts. Moreover, the study was conducted at a select group of institutions of higher education within the Philippines and may not therefore be representative of the total variety of institutions where international nursing students are enrolled. Future studies using longitudinal mixed-method methodology with larger and more diverse samples of participants and alternative observational data collected from clinical placement sites would greatly enhance the evidential base in this area.

CONCLUSION

This phenomenological study illuminated the lived experiences of 14 international nursing students enrolled in Philippine nursing programs, revealing a complex and dynamic interplay of motivating factors, lifeworld challenges, and forward-looking professional aspirations. The research found that the lived experiences of nursing students were shaped by a dynamic and multifaceted interaction between motivations, challenges related to the lived-world, and aspirations for future professional practice. Informed by family connections, financial support, the availability of educational opportunities, and the perceived international recognition of nursing in the Philippines, students made enrollment decisions. Within the educational environment, students experienced a number of significant hurdles in the form of barriers to language access, psychosocial distress, difficulties with identity, and high-academic-load expectations, mitigated through support from faculty, support from peers, and faith-based networks. Overall, students exhibited resilience, professional development, and the development of strong transnational professional nursing identities despite these challenges. Looking ahead, students envisioned future professional experiences characterized by clinical excellence, leadership in the provision of health care, transnational mobility, and purposeful mentoring of the next generation of nurses.

The results of this research highlight the urgent need for structural policies that create equity-focused language assistance, promote the creation of structured mental health resources, provide anti-discriminatory frameworks for clinical placements, and develop culturally competent educational environments so that international nursing students are able to be not only retained but also supported and prepared to become globally competent and compassionate nursing professionals.

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