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## Across Borders: Opportunities and Challenges of Filipino College Graduates in Foreign Workplaces

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### ABSTRACT

Filipino college graduates' migration has grown significantly as a result of their desire for better job opportunities, greater pay, and more opportunities for professional development. These graduates frequently struggle with underemployment, lack of credential recognition, and cultural adaptation in foreign workplaces, even though they make up 27% of the entire migrant population. A significant study vacuum is revealed by the fact that existing literature usually ignores the combined impact of social networks, working conditions, and personal characteristics on the stability and commitment of Filipino graduates overseas. By examining the opportunities and difficulties faced by Filipino college graduates in international employment, this study seeks to fill this gap. It focuses on the ways in which social ties, workplace safety, career potential, educational background, English proficiency, and macroeconomic factors affect occupational stability. Employing a descriptive phenomenological design, the research utilized semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions to gather qualitative data from Filipino graduates working abroad. Data were analyzed using content analysis and open coding to identify key themes and subthemes, with expert validation ensuring rigor. The results show graduates take jobs outside of their field due to economic hardship and a lack of local job opportunities, cultural and physical workplace challenges exacerbate the underutilization of educational skills, and graduates use community connections and self-improvement as coping mechanisms. These observations emphasize the necessity of organizational support networks and policy changes to better identify skills, promote professional growth, and improve the welfare of Filipino graduates living abroad. The study's highlight how crucial comprehensive support is to ensuring that graduates who are globally mobile have meaningful career transitions.

### INTRODUCTION

Filipino college graduates have established migration to foreign workplaces as a significant trend since they seek improved career prospects alongside increased pay rates and enhanced professional growth. Statistics from the Commission on Overseas Filipinos show that college-educated Filipinos make up 27% of the total migration population. The United Arab Emirates together with Australia Canada and the United States function as leading migration choices because these nations need skilled employees and respect the qualifications earned by Filipinos. Social networks with "weak ties" play a vital part in improving job search outcomes (Absuelo & Hancock, 2015). Research demonstrated the importance of these ties for both employability and securing suitable employment that matches the education and abilities of graduates (Guevarra & Reyes, 2021). Studies reveal that Filipino workers abroad base their migration choices and work outcomes on their educational achievements and household job status together with macroeconomic factors that impact their remittance amounts and wages. Philippine college graduates face major hurdles when seeking employment abroad because they experience underemployment as well as difficulties from lack of credential recognition and cultural misunderstanding (Asis, 2017; Continents, 2024), with workplace safety

risks being an additional concern. Filipino workers demonstrate sufficient qualifications for skilled positions yet experience obstacles that result in work placements that fail to match their expertise requirements or force them to obtain supplementary certifications to comply with local requirements (Agunias & Newland, 2012; Reyes & Tan, 2023). Research has shown an insufficient understanding of the combined effects that personal attributes together with work and economic conditions and social network connections have on Filipino graduate workforce stability during international employment. Current research generally analyzes global migration patterns or particular professions while missing the opportunity to examine Filipino college graduates' full experiences during foreign study (ILO, 2021; Orbeta, Abrigo, & Cabalfin, 2020).

The study seeks to address this void by examining Filipino college graduates' workplace opportunities as well as challenges in foreign environments. The study investigates what impact personal college degree level education together with English language ability and work-linked career potential combined with workplace safety conditions and macroeconomic data including earning rates combined with social connections have on their global occupational stability and employment commitment (Aguilar, 2017; Battistella & Asis, 2011).

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The analytical approach aims to help administrators and educators alongside employers develop better support systems for Filipino graduates by showcasing complete market dynamics (Medina, 2020; Saito, 2020). The research examines how Filipino college graduates experience both opportunities and challenges in foreign workplaces especially relevant to underemployment issues. The research investigates the main causes behind underemployment among college graduates working abroad while assessing approaches to bridge educational credentials with career opportunities. The research aims to create solutions that help Filipino graduates move successfully from education to meaningful careers no matter which border they work in.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

### Research Design

The research used descriptive phenomenology with phenomenological methodology to conduct its qualitative investigations. This research combined semi-structured interviewing methods with focus-group discussion approaches to obtain qualitative details about underemployment experiences among college graduates in foreign workplaces while performing employment status surveys.

### Research Instrument

The study received approval from expert panel members for their semi-structured interview questions. The method of semi-structured interview technique in qualitative research includes various open-ended questions. Another benefit of this method enables researchers to discover innovative insights about their topic and allows them to thoroughly examine participant answers. Graduate acceptance of non-study field employment served as the focus for research using semi-structured interview methodology. Participants had freedom to present their career decision process through this research method which enabled them to express themselves without pre-set reading definitions.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The participants checked and validated research ethical compliance by reviewing documents sent prior to the study. The study participants obtained complete documentation about the research and electronic consent procedures and interview requirements through their email correspondence. Researchers conducted semi-structured interviews which served to obtain substantial occupational work data from participants so they could understand how their academic field influenced their career decisions.

### Analysis of Data

Researchers followed an organized data transcription technique suited for phenomenological descriptive analytical approaches. The research design allowed researchers to receive precise information about how

members took jobs in fields outside their first academic subjects. The researcher spent time reviewing all interview transcription work starting from the initial recordings while conducting translations until they completed thorough data analysis. Traditional content analysis techniques enabled researchers to identify vital statements and derive significant units from obtained data. Researchers applied open coding to develop initial concepts before creating subthemes which received specific definitions through this method.

### Analysis of Data

The researchers executed precise data transcription methods that adhered to phenomenological descriptive approach guidelines. Through this research design researchers gathered factual knowledge concerning participants who took positions outside their academic backgrounds in foreign workplaces. The researchers checked all interview transcripts both before and after recording, translation and after complete data evaluation. Through traditional content analysis researchers identified crucial data points that followed meaningful data extraction procedures. The open coding methods enables researchers to isolate concepts that lead to development of subthemes and definition construction.

A system of tables and diagrams led to conceptual pattern identification during the assessment of subtheme relationships. Through constant comparison analysis researchers combined themes with their subthemes after applying line-by-line coding to develop the themes. Multiple rounds of analysis helped researchers confirm and define their themes while avoiding important elements in the studied phenomenon. Specialist experts examined the research findings to validate the data interpretation processes.

### Ethical Considerations

The researcher maintained constant compliance to human rights legislations and safety regulations and health protocols as well as legal standards and conflict of interest requirements throughout the study duration. Before obtaining permission from participants, they received both information and consent documents for evaluation and approval. Finished transcription materials needed review from each participant before their approval was earned. The study provided participants with protection of all their answers and personal data through complete confidentiality assurances. Throughout this research the researcher properly credited all authors who contributed material while providing continuous ethical transparency in every research stage.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section shows the themes extracted from interview transcript data. A systematic approach first converted transcripts into codes to derive themes before developing final themes emerged. The evaluative process of graduate work experiences within their non-field employment

revealed key findings that explored career obstacles and success lights. The evaluation of transcript statements yielded various higher-order themes from the analysis.

### **Economic Challenges and Limited Local Job Opportunities**

Economic hardships together with scarcity of local job opportunities lead Filipino college graduates to accept employment outside their specialties in order to provide financial support for their families. Every participant explained that the need to support their families created the motivation for making their career choices. Participant 1 explained, “Local employment opportunities for nursing positions paid minimal rates... the available position provided better financial compensation.” The scarce nursing jobs within the local area offered insufficient pay until the participant discovered a role with higher compensation. Participant 2 clarified that “Engineering positions in our country excluded me because most companies expected previous work experience... this role enabled me to keep my parents financially stable.” Participant 5 explained that “I took up this foreign work to handle my family debts following Typhoon Pablo... jobs abroad offered better pay.” New graduates must often meet their instant financial requirements through any job available instead of pursuing professional career opportunities.

Many young Filipino graduates immigrate to foreign employment because their professional aptitudes do not match local job openings, while they face pressure to make sufficient finances for their families. The current labor market features extensive underemployment patterns combined with professional skills mismatches affecting Filipino professionals (Orbeta *et al.*, 2020). The country faces a dual challenge because highly educated young adults must deal with poor career prospects while simultaneously losing valuable educated workers who end up in un-aligning roles. Studies show that the economic conditions together with inadequate local job opportunities drive Filipino graduates to take jobs outside their field of study especially in foreign markets (Cabegin, 2021; Orbeta *et al.*, 2020). National talent distribution patterns produce problems that affect two main population groups in addition to creating permanent workforce challenges.

### **Underutilization of Educational Skills Amidst Cultural and Physical Challenges in Workplaces**

Graduate students from the Philippines face challenges when transferring their education knowledge through the combination of adjusting to foreign cultures and hard physical labor at international workplaces. The participants repeatedly mentioned their college-based abilities and learning go unrecognized in workplace settings resulting in professional disappointment. Participant 1 mentioned, “Local employment opportunities for nursing positions paid minimal rates... the available position provided better financial compensation.” expressed disappointment

about the lack of use of their educational skills but Participant 2 stated, “The mental strain caused by my inability to practice nursing weighs heavily upon me.” The participants expressed similar experiences concerning professional practice as seen in Participant 4, “I cannot practice using my nursing degree” and Participant 5, “I never really practice the psychology I studied in school.” Participants experienced various professional challenges along with difficulties that included missing their home environment as well as language barrier worries together with exhaustion. Participant 3 described, “physically exhausting work combined with cultural adaptation,” that conducting physically demanding work alongside adapting to new cultural norms was the most challenging aspect while Participant 7 noted, “Language learning and cultural adjustment proved to be among the most difficult aspects for me.” As language acquisition and cultural settling down proved to be their biggest hurdles.

Migrant professionals from the Philippines encounter multiple practice barriers while working abroad because they experience problems with professional credential recognition and struggle with language use and face workplace discrimination (Aguillon & Quisumbing, 2020; Dizon-Abrera *et al.*, 2023). Research demonstrates that such obstacles create emotional stress as well as work dissatisfaction particularly if a migrant professional’s duties exceed their qualifications (Guevarra & Reyes, 2021). Both career advancement opportunities and psychological state get affected when employment roles do not align with educational qualifications and workers struggle to adapt culturally and face physically challenging labor requirements (SunStar, 2024). Organizations together with policymakers must establish better methods to acknowledge work-related skills and support professional development for Filipino graduates working in international workplaces. Solution-based approaches aiming to tackle these matters would enhance migrant worker job satisfaction as well as mental health and work performance.

### **Self-Improvement and Community Connection**

Philippine college graduates who work overseas beneficially employ self-improvement alongside community inclusion as methods to confront obstacles while gaining foreign work prospects. The study shows clear support from participant testimonies regarding their efforts to keep learning and develop their skills together with their focus on social relationships. Participant 1 stated, “During my day off I study nursing online refresher courses and regularly join church services while maintaining contacts with my loved ones.” Professional development along with emotional support systems need to remain active due to their critical importance in international workplaces. “Engineering modules along with online studies are my main focus while I maximize my savings through my current actions. Professional networking with foreign professionals is also part of my strategy.” take up most of Participant 2’s academic time

but he optimizes his financial situation with his current practices. Foreign professional networking stands as one of my approaches for success. The interview response showcases simultaneous commitment to obtain new abilities along with establishing valuable professional relationships. Some participants stressed both the development of their personality and their connections to their community. Participant 4 mentioned “I follow goal tracking while taking IT certifications online as I maintain regular communication with other OFWs for support,” while Participant 7 shared, “I use writing private blogs about Philippine Foreign Worker experiences to maintain my connection to reality. I learn Japanese language along with performing freelance writing work from home.” These answers demonstrate the participants actively work toward building their qualifications alongside preserving their cultural heritage.

Philippine graduates who study abroad demonstrate dedication to both their technical competence development along with self-care strategies and social adaptation solutions. In addition to writing and prayer, Participant 5 stated, “I dedicate myself to writing and prayer in addition to participating in mental health webinar training. Joining support circles that target overseas Filipino workers has been part of my online activities,” Participant 6 mentioned that, “Participating in Filipino community activities is also a part of my regular routine” The routine of community activities with Filipino people remains a fundamental part of Participant 6’s routine. The success and adaptive skills of migrant professionals rely heavily on continuous learning efforts combined with networking activities as well as community involvement activities (Cruz & Estacio, 2021; Reyes, 2018). The participation of overseas workers in professional development and social support systems enhances their ability to adapt to new environments and improves their career prospects while decreasing their feelings of isolation (Santos & Alampay, 2019). A strong connection between both host community and home community leads to better well-being and increased job satisfaction (Dela Cruz & Yu, 2019). Filipino graduates who participate in lifelong education alongside community work obtain superior abilities to face international work challenges. Organizations together with lawmakers need to understand these methods for success and provide essential resources including learning opportunities and community connections specific to Filipino cultural needs.

### **Strategic Patience and Continuous Self-Improvement**

The main recommendation from participant interviews emphasizes that Filipino college graduates who are underemployed should focus on developing both strategic patience and constant personal improvement. Multiple participants recommend that underemployed Filipino college graduates accept their current situation by learning new skills to align with professional goals for their future careers. Multiple respondents saw

underemployment as a practical opportunity for career advancement instead of accepting it as career regression. The participant 3 suggested “Come to terms with the present yet keep developing your skill sets after work. Maintain your present employment to support yourself and use free time for developing your passions and skills.” Participant 1 shared the same perspective when they said “Keep your mind open.” Work assignments give learners a chance to learn new things because knowledge expansion continues throughout personal development. Underemployment serves as a chance to collect new abilities which enable individuals to qualify for better prospects during future time frames. Strategic patience serves as an important recommendation according to participant 2 who advises “Be patient and strategic.” Getting ready for future possibilities enables your present substandard role to evolve into a better prospect. One subject participant shared, “Forever maintain a long-term perspective.” Current life responsibilities that you face now will create future advantages. The information advises university graduates to understand that their present position will eventually transform into something more advanced through strategic dedication.

The research and labor market analyses in recent times support this theme in Philippine condition. The Philippine Institute for Development Studies emphasizes long-term learning through skill development because Filipino professionals must succeed in fast-paced international and regional work environments (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2023). The Filipino workforce needs to transform itself through adaptable upskilling because adapting to evolving global requirements and technological shifts ensures organizational competitiveness (World Bank, 2023). Graduates need resilience and ongoing personal development because of the difficult economic situation and substantial underemployment problems in the labor market. Graduates must now prioritize developing their soft skills and gaining practical experience together with adaptability because the COVID-19 pandemic has deepened existing challenges (Garcia, J. X. (Garcia, 2025). Graduates with patience together with career planning and continuous skill improvement will face increased chances of underemployment success in local and international settings. This method contributes to enhancing individual success as well as national workforce competitiveness (Continents, 2024; Remot *et al.*, 2021).

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Filipino college graduates seeking employment in unrelated fields abroad face difficulties finding jobs due to a lack of employment opportunities, limited job prospects, and outdated skills. Due to financial strains and a lack of local career options, Filipino college graduates sometimes work outside of their disciplines, which leads to underemployment and underutilization of their skills. Language hurdles, cultural adjustment, and lack of credential recognition exacerbate these difficulties, which

have an impact on well-being and job advancement. Graduates use strategies like professional networking, community involvement, and further education to adjust and enhance their chances in spite of these challenges. They encourage perseverance and continuous self-improvement, seeing underemployment as a stepping stone. Individual achievement and the general competitiveness of the Filipino workforce can both be improved by bolstering these initiatives with focused policies and initiatives.

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