Filipinos on Education Migration Pathways to English-Using Destination Countries

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Abstract

English-speaking migration destination countries have implemented policies that promote pathways for international students to transition into skilled migrants. In 2019, Australia alone recorded total international student enrolment approaching one million, underscoring the economic significance of the sector (Australian Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2019). This has positioned international education as the destination country's largest services export. In an increasingly competitive global market, the availability of post-study work opportunities has become a key factor influencing student recruitment and enrollment in educational institutions in destination countries. However, in Australia (Morris et al., 2021) and Canada (Pottie-Sherman et al., 2024), both top destinations for study abroad programs, temporary educational migrants are unfairly blamed and cited as contributors to domestic challenges such as housing shortages and job scarcity for locals, leading destination countries to enforce stricter regulations on these pathways. This study examines the factors that influence students' choices to pursue education in English-speaking countries, the strategies Filipinos use to navigate educational migration pathways, and the impact of language on their study-abroad choices in these destinations.

Keywords: Migration Linguistics, Educational Migration, International Students, Global Student Mobility

1. Introduction

For many Filipinos, migration is a key pathway to upward social and economic mobility (Bernardo et al., 2018). The underdevelopment of the domestic economy, which struggles to absorb graduates from higher education institutions (HEIs), has led over 10 percent of Philippine citizens to live and work in more than 160 countries (Ruiz, 2014). As a result, the role of HEIs in the Philippines has evolved. They are now expected not only to prepare students for the local job market but also to equip them for employment opportunities abroad (Ortiga, 2017).

Policies that support post-study work opportunities further reinforce this trend. For example, Canada's Post-Graduation Work Permit allows international students to gain valuable work experience, while Australia permits student visa holders to work up to 48 hours per fortnight, providing an economic incentive for student migrants. The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the demand for labour-driven migration as a direct reaction to removing limits on off-campus work for temporary migrants' hours by government agencies in Canada (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2022) and Australia (Australian Department of Home Affairs, 2020).

The Commission on Higher Education's Policy and Standards on the Internationalization of Philippine Higher Education identifies an urgent need for an 'increasing number of graduates who possess employable skills, both in the domestic and international labour markets, global perspectives, and adaptable mindsets' (Commission on Higher Education, 2016). Ortiga (2017) further elaborates this by citing the shift toward an export-oriented education model in Philippine HEIs identified by the Philippines being widely known for training its citizens for overseas jobs in the hope of maximizing monetary remittances they will eventually send back home, coupled with accessible migration pathways to countries without language barriers, has encouraged more Filipinos to study overseas. Many see this path as a route to permanent residency, especially if it leads to stable employment. Economic factors consistently drive international students' migration choices, with educational aspirations, personal growth, and cultural experiences as secondary motivations (Fakunle, 2021). International students also provide significant economic benefits to destination countries by paying substantially higher tuition fees compared to domestic students (OECD, 2022; Phillimore & Koshy, 2010).

In response to growing numbers of international students, policy changes in destination countries are shaping migration strategies. These temporary migrants have been often cited as the causes for challenges in housing shortages and a scarcity of employment opportunities for locals. In Australia, concurrent reforms such as Australia's increased English language proficiency requirement and increased proof of financial capacity requirement (McDonald, 2024), coupled with changes by the Australian Department of Home Affairs, closed a loophole that had previously allowed students to hold concurrent Confirmations of Enrolment (CoEs) in higher education and vocational training, making it easier to switch educational providers shortly after arrival. These have been key to regulating student migration by filtering out those motivated primarily by economic opportunities.

Reforms in other countries include Canada's 35% reduction in student permit issuance (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024a) and the United Kingdom's restrictions on family members accompanying student visa holders. These policy adjustments reflect the review by various governments of their respective migration policies, which found the current system no longer eases shortages of skilled labour nor does it provide economic benefits for the destination country.

As destination countries tighten immigration pathways, students and educational providers must navigate an increasingly complex landscape, balancing aspirations with practical considerations. This study examines the factors influencing Filipino students' choices to pursue education in English-speaking countries, alongside the strategies they employ to navigate these migration pathways. Furthermore, this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

(i) What are the factors affecting decisions to study abroad in English-speaking countries?

(ii) What are the strategies employed by Filipinos in taking education migration pathways to English-using destination countries?

(iii) How does language shape the decisions of Filipinos in taking educational migration pathways to English-using destination countries?

Language plays a central role in migrant integration; according to the International Organization for Migration (2019), language proficiency is essential for migrants to access opportunities and integrate successfully into host communities. Borlongan (2023) further emphasizes that language is "at the heart of migration (p.38)." Thus, this study also highlights the critical role of language in shaping Filipino students' decisions to study abroad in these destinations.

2. Methodology

2.1 Subjects

The study involved forty Filipino international students currently studying in select English-using countries or who have finished their studies within a period of 12 months. Participants were selected based on the following criteria:

(i)   They have been born in the Republic of the Philippines and identify as Filipinos.

(ii)   They all have student or temporary graduate research visas in any of the five English-using destination countries, namely Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, the United States and New Zealand.

(iii)   They have lived in their destination country for a minimum period of 12 months and have working proficiency in the English language. Participants were recruited and selected through either peer-to-peer networks or partnerships with registered migration agents or lawyers at the destination country.

Educational migrants refer to an individual who moves from their home country to another country to pursue educational opportunities or study abroad programs. This movement is often driven by (i) the pursuit of higher-quality education, (ii) language acquisition, or (iii) specialized training not available in their home country (Dustmann & Glitz, 2011). At the start of the 21st century, a policy shift established a pathway between international study and immigration in Canada (Schinnerl & Ellermann, 2023), Australia (Tsukamoto, 2009), and New Zealand (Lomer, 2017). To understand the findings of our survey questionnaire, interviews, and group discussions, it is crucial to give a background of the educational migrants that participated in the study. Half of the total educational migrants are between the ages of 25 and 34 years old, and nearly a fourth of them are in the age ranges of 35 to 44. Educational migrants below the age of 24 were only observed to be 8.33%, and those above age 45 were 16% of the total study population of the participants.

More than a third of the population (41%) have completed higher education and had earned a bachelor's degree prior to migration, while a third of the population (33%) have completed secondary education. The rest of the population (26%) had earned a graduate degree prior to leaving for their destination country. The self-assessed English proficiency of the participants varied significantly. A notable proportion, particularly those who were nurtured in English-speaking environments, rated their proficiency as high. For instance, participants who were not born into and/or raised in English-using families or communities reported

communicative abilities due to exposure in the school setup growing up. These individuals indicated they could successfully carry out daily communicative acts in society and express most of their life experiences in English. English proficiency levels among the participants ranged from basic comprehension and speaking abilities to more advanced fluency.

2.2 Data Collection

To be able to understand the experiences of Filipino international students in light of immigration policy changes to study abroad programs and educational visa policies, a survey questionnaire was conducted both in print and digital form. The said questionnaire specifically inquired about:

(i) Demographic and socioeconomic status, such as the source(s) and amount of personal income or allowances received and dependents living with the participant.

(ii) Motivations and decision-making factors about the reasons behind pursuing education abroad and the decision-making process undergone.

(iii) Proficiency in the English language and experience in taking standardized language proficiency assessment tests.

(iv) Challenges to living abroad in the dimensions of academic, financial, and social.

(v) Post-study plans and institutional support and guidance to navigate the ever-changing immigration policies.

The questionnaire was designed to be a six-point weighted scale where the lowest value meant the participant strongly disagrees with a statement and the highest value meant they strongly agree with the statement. These inquiries were validated against four widely recognized psychological instruments to quantify the emotional, mental, and social well-being of migrants. These four tools specifically were:

(i) Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995) to capture how migrants adapt to the new environment

(ii) Satisfaction with Life Scale (Diener et al., 1985) to assess contentment of migrants after relocation

(iii) Subjective Happiness Scale (Lyubomirsky & Ross, 1999) to validate internal motivation factors for pushing the participants to pursue education abroad

(iv) UCLA Loneliness Scale (Russell et al., 1978) to uncover the social challenges of migration

After gathering the initial data, these were processed and sorted into age groups, destination countries, and level of study and were further validated by way of three focus group discussions, each lasting 90 minutes and consisting of at least two participants with similar age groups, academic levels of studies pursued, and post-study plans. The focus group discussions primarily focused on two topics:

(i) Migration challenges specific to educational migrants and the participants' respective coping mechanisms

(ii) Experiences that shape their attitudes towards languages both in the academic and social environments.

2.3 Profiles of Filipino Educational Migrants

Upon analysis of the survey results, dominant groups consisting of similar demographic and behavioral traits have been observed. These two major groups are as follows:

(i) A group that has undergone two-step migration coming from a working visa issued by countries known to have strict policies in terms of granting permanent residencies despite long tenures of legal residence and work. This group of educational migrants are in the age groups of 25 to 34 years old and primarily motivated by goals of finding permanent residency outside of their current country of work, and providing a better quality of living for their immediate family (children) that are still based in the Philippines. This group has high tendencies of pursuing a secondary bachelor's degree to either recognize current skills or to shift into an industry that offers post-study employment opportunities.

(ii) A group of professionals in the Philippines coming from tenured work positions in middle to upper management, defined by the Philippine Institute of Development Studies to be upper middle class but not rich (in terms of total household income of P131,484 to P219,140 monthly income) (Albert et al., 2018, 2024). Educational migrants in the age groups of 35 years old to 44 years old are primarily motivated by the thought of studying, living, and working abroad. These dual-income couples with no kids are searching with the goal of improving migration mobility through second citizenships and passports. The tendency to pursue graduate studies is observed in this group of people.

3. Foundations and Expectations of Migration:

3.1 Initial Motivations

The journey of Filipino educational migrants stems from push factors from the origin country. These factors range from low wages, limited opportunities, and poor access to social services. In the case of Filipino educational migrants, the common motivations of post-study opportunities strongly influence decisions to study abroad and the broadening of one's social network for prospects of employment after studies. With the rise of cultural capital, or the non-financial assets that influence mobility and social status (Bourdieu, 1986), organizations such as the British Council and the International Development Program have successfully branded their quality of education as world-class, thus entering the era of soft selling of world-class education. (Ayling, 2019).

Whether it may be being able to work permanently in the destination country or repatriate afterwards, the idea of global education prestige from studying in HEIs of these destination countries carries the employer perception that these graduates have stronger communication, critical thinking, and global perspective skills. (Waters, 2006). The OECD shows that repatriated professionals command 15 to 25% higher salaries in their origin countries when compared to local graduates. (OECD, 2022) and that three in 10 first-time study permit holders became permanent residents within 10 years. (Choi et al., 2021).

3.2 Initial Expectations and Pre-Departure

    (i)   A successful pre-departure orientation program, as argued by Grove (1989), proposes five distinct goals:

    (ii)   Help students to focus on their own culture, values, and behaviors.

    (iii)   Help students develop realistic expectations.

    (iv)   Ease anxiety of departure and arrival.

    (v)   Describe the program and system of expected behaviors.

    (vi)   Give practical and logistical information.

Van Amelsvoort (1999) proposes the addition of two more goals, namely: (1) to give some instruction on language learning strategies, and (2) to give some intensive instruction in English, specifically listening practice and survival homestay vocabulary.

At the pre-departure phase, larger university networks, or those with enrollment populations that cater to at least 30% of their student population to international students, have systemized the pre-departure and post-arrival orientation training to reduce arrival friction of the educational migrant. With changes to service delivery brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, a mix of asynchronous and synchronous systems have been enacted by university networks to prepare students prior to leaving. Mandatory modules of videos about campus

services, academic services, legal conditions of their visas such as work and activity limitations, and university-specific policies are now available for consumption prior to the arrival of the educational migrant to campus. Moving from the model of getting oriented on Day 1 to the orientation beginning before students arrive in hopes of closing the gap between the life they had imagined and the actuality of what they experience when they arrive. (Khanal & Gaulee, 2019). When looking at the views of the participants, despite these efforts of the universities, only 5 in 10 believe that they are somewhat ready upon arrival in the destination country.

The expectation of (1) upward social mobility by way of ample balance between studying and employment opportunities, (2) family reunification, (3) improved quality of life driven by the destination country's high economic status are the common narratives in the focus group discussions regardless of what destination country Filipino educational migrants opt to pursue. These narratives are formed through the stories of those who have gone abroad to study before them, testimonials gathered by the schools that offer programs, and advertisements that educational migrants see online.

4. Everyday Language and Cultural Adaptation

Most, if not all, international students come from countries where English is not a primary language. Andrade (2009) argues that this poses an added challenge to academic demands and the demands of adjusting to a new culture. While it is perceived that international students face difficulties with oral and written communication (Trice, 2003), Filipinos share different experiences in adaptation.

English is one of the two mediums of instruction in the Philippines, the other one being the respective mother tongue in the region of the student (Maramag-Manalastas & Batang, 2018). English is also the language of day-to-day life in the destination country of these educational migrants.

When asked, 60% of the participants believe that, given their current language skills, they somewhat agree that they are somewhat prepared for cultural, linguistic differences, and lifestyle differences. When compared to the Chinese and other East Asian countries such as South Korea and Taiwan for these international students, English language proficiency is considered the primary challenge to the success of international students regardless of age (Andrade, 2009; Leong, 2015; Li et al., 2018).

Ovchinnikova et al. (2022) argue that language proximity is a major factor that simplifies academic, cultural, and socio-economic integration of international students in the destination country, thus a good explanation as to why Filipinos have strong preferences in choosing English-using destination countries such as the United Kingdom (Kahanec & Králiková, 2011), the United States (Lee & Tan, 1984), Australia (Mazzarol & Soutar, 2002), and Canada (Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). Language proximity is defined as the linguistic distance between the student's origin and destination country. This distance refers to the degree of dissimilarity between two languages, considering elements like vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and other linguistic features. (Ovchinnikova et al., 2022).

However, despite the proximity of the languages of the origin and destination country, when the participants were asked to compare expectations of ease of cultural adaptation vis-a-vis their real-world experiences, these were their responses:

… "In the United Kingdom, with the many regional accents, we find it hard to adjust and understand what the other person in the conversation wishes to portray."

… "Listening to Americans speak in Sacramento and on campus is no different from the media I have come to consume through various online streaming platforms."

Seven in 10 Filipino students in the United Kingdom have shown significant challenges in cultural adaptation due to the stronger regional English accents and the differences of vocabulary choices in this destination country. In a direct comparison to the experiences of Filipino international students in select areas of Northern America (United States and Canada), only four in 10 international students report facing more challenges than expected with the manner of speed that the English language is used towards them.

This reduction in perceived integration challenges between the two destination countries may be attributed to the language attitudes of these migrants and the proximity of the English used in the Philippines and in Northern America. Young Filipinos strongly associate English with upward mobility, and the preferred model of English in the Philippines is American English. (Borlongan, 2009). This idea is further complemented by the linguistic analysis of Philippine English and American English that show a high degree of similarity (Schneider, 2022). This highlights potentially the need for lesser cultural and linguistic

preparedness when engaging within the select destinations of Northern America as compared to other destinations such as the United Kingdom and New Zealand.

5. Academic Integration

Baker and Siryk (1999) identifies four key aspects of successful academic integration: academic adjustment, social adjustment, personal adjustment, and emotional adjustment. Academic adjustment involves how well a student manages the educational demands, including motivation, effort, performance, and satisfaction with the academic environment. Social adjustment refers to how effectively a student handles interpersonal and societal aspects, such as making friends, participating in social activities, and collaborating in group work. Personal adjustment pertains to a student's ability to adapt to the personal challenges of academic life, such as managing time, balancing responsibilities, and maintaining a healthy routine. Emotional adjustment reflects how students cope with the emotional aspects of their experience, including stress, anxiety, and overall emotional well-being.

5.1 Admissions Journey

The admissions journey of most Filipino international students begins with one of three journeys. They (i) see an advertisement for a study abroad program conducted through educational roadshows that go city-to-city providing free assessment of credentials and matching of a program, (ii) they see a testimonial from a close family member or friend who has tried the program and succeeded, or (iii) for currently enrolled students in high school, they are enticed by partner schools of their current school attended to try to attend higher education in a different country.

Education providers work with various third parties called education agents. These education agents are private enterprises or individuals appointed to represent providers in the marketing and pre-admissions journey in the international student recruitment journey. They play a vital role in providing information to students on programs and the application process. (O'Connell, 2012). Education agents are given a percentage of the student tuition fees paid in the form of commissions for the work they undertake. This scheme year after year brings 3 in 4 international students to Australia (Australian Department of Education, 2019) and more than half of those in New Zealand (Nikula**,** 2020).

At the beginning of the admissions process, international students are provided with various information that may make them consider partaking in a study abroad program. The

largest motivator to pick a program, according to the participants of this study, is that of the presence of post-study work outcomes, which is followed by the ability to bring one's family or immediate dependents at the point of migration. Occasionally, programs offered by education providers come with a form of employment within the university co-operative network or placements through alumni networks. The admission journey takes anywhere from thirty days to half a year depending on the availability of admission requirements or an intake date from the educational provider.

Interested students then proceed to fulfill requirement categories such as:

(i)   academic and scholastic requirements, which include details of previous degrees earned, a comprehensive curriculum vitae, transcripts, and a statement of purpose.

(ii)   proof of English language mastery, such as evidence of taking standardized English language tests.

(iii) additional immigration requirements, such as proof of economic ties to their home country and proof of financial capacity to undertake the study abroad program.

(iv)   country-specific requirements attributed to their educational visa risk profiling of the origin country.

The outward migration of Philippine labour migrants is heavily regulated by the Department of Migrant Workers. Contracts are scrutinized, and a government-mandated pre-departure seminar is conducted (Saguin & Shivakoti, 2022). In the case of those wishing to visit common-law partners abroad or get married to partners that are not Filipino, a clearance must first be obtained from the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (Reyes, 2017). Failure to secure ample paperwork or clearances from either government agency shall bar the migrant from exiting formal border controls of the Philippines. In the case of educational migrants exiting formal border controls of the Philippines, no such government-mandated controls exist.

A study abroad program requires an interested student to have enough financial capacity to support them for the whole duration of their studies. Proving that one has ample capacity to partake in a study abroad endeavor is the largest barrier in the admissions process. The absence of regulation has led a multitude of international students to rely on the advice of their educational agent. This has led to education agents misleading students and committing documentation and financial fraud in aiding this barrier (Nikula, 2020).

5.2 Transition to Academic Life and Classroom Engagement

About a third of the participants have not sat in a classroom setup for nearly a decade. This group of participants are those who have undergone two-step migration from being labour

migrants in another country to being students in this destination country. Exposure to different cultures and opinions have led them to being open to participating in discussions. To quote a participant:

> … "Living in Singapore for more than 9 years has exposed me to a fast-paced lifestyle juggling multiple requirements due at the same time and different ways to get along with different kinds of people-in Filipino we call this pakisama."

On the other hand, for the remaining two-thirds of the participants, this study abroad program is their first exposure to cultures other than their own. Multicultural, multilingual students from diverse ethnic backgrounds enrich classroom discussions with each perspective. However, for the Filipino student engaging with other cultures for the first time, participating in class dialogue requires more adjustment than for those who have lived abroad previously. Hesitance to speak due to their accents or fear of being "wrong" limits such engagement. In an exploration of some dominant features of Filipino social behavior, Bonifacio finds that many students do not dare ask questions because of the fear that others may laugh at them for being wrong (Bonifacio, 1977)

Another factor that causes initial struggles is academic norms present in Philippine culture. Filipino students often come from teacher-centered education environments (Eleazar et al., 2020), and crossing the chasm to a discussion- and outcomes-oriented, independent learning environment proves to be a challenge. Hanushek & Woessmann (2010) point out that the upfront direct measurement of educational outcomes emerges as the one strong policy factor underlying growth differences across OECD countries from countries that do not have such policy.

6. Social Networks and Integration

Filipino migrant students, despite their strong cultural foundation, often face challenges when their strengths—rooted in values like *kapwa* (shared identity) and *pakikipagkapwa* (interaction and fellowship)—collide with institutional and structural barriers. Institutional and cultural barriers are obstacles stemming from established systems (institutions) and societal norms (culture) that can hinder progress, access, or opportunities (Drew, 1982). While Filipinos are generally known for their strong English skills (Davis & Batalova, 2023), these strong cultural foundations are not always recognized or valued in mainstream educational systems. Enriquez

(1992) argues that these cultural values are essential to Filipino identity. Yet, in the context of education, the system often fails to leverage them as strengths.

6.1 Social Integration and Support

One key strength among Filipinos is their strong preference for Filipino connections as a form of social support (Gaviola et al., 2024). As echoed in focus group discussions, many Filipino migrants express comfort in surrounding themselves with fellow Filipinos because of shared understanding and a common cultural language. One participant shared:

> I prefer to be with fellow Filipinos due to the ease of understanding one another. In my opinion, with other people from other racial backgrounds, I cannot fully express what I want to say. This might cause misunderstandings. But do not get me wrong; I do not have any problems getting to know other people from other backgrounds.

This highlights the importance of maintaining close ties within their own community to foster understanding and mitigate the risk of cultural miscommunication.

Furthermore, the Filipino family plays a central role in social life, as Mulder (1994) points out. More than half (63%) of participants in the study brought their common-law partners, husbands, or wives, and children (if applicable) with them. For many Filipino migrants, the family unit remains a key source of support and social connection. As one participant shared:

> When there are no classes at school nor is there a shift at my workplace, I prefer to be with my family and go to the park with them.

This underscores the deep cultural value placed on family and how it shapes their social interactions and integration into the new environment. However, despite these cultural strengths, Filipino migrants still face challenges in integrating fully into the broader social fabric. Harvey & Mallman (2019) points out the impact of mainly two barriers to integration: The first is related to institutional barriers, such as language requirements, standardized testing, and rigid educational structures, which often disadvantage certain groups of students. These barriers can make it difficult for migrant students to fully participate and succeed within the education system. The second is structural barriers which refer to broader societal inequalities,

such as poverty, limited access to resources, and constrained social networks, that further limit the opportunities available to migrant students. These systemic obstacles make it harder for migrant students to engage fully in the educational environment, limiting their ability to build relationships and access resources that could help them thrive.

6.2 Life Satisfaction and Well-being

Migrant students often experience a range of challenges that impact their life satisfaction and well-being after relocation. These challenges are reflected in indicators such as financial stress, adaptation difficulties, and social isolation. The key narratives that emerge from these students from focus group discussions include the following:

(i)   unexpectedly steep rises in the cost of living.

(ii)   difficulty in securing stable work opportunities.

(iii)   stress related to financial affairs, all of which resonate with broader research.

These findings are aligned with the challenges of adjustment to new living and working conditions, especially in an environment with fluctuating costs and competitive job markets, which can significantly impact overall well-being.

To better understand how migrants adapt to their new environment, we employ the Psychological Well-Being Scale (Ryff, 1989; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). Migrants, especially those in their first three months, rethink their purpose in life, especially when facing external pressures like financial insecurity or social isolation. For example, a common narrative is:

When I am having a hard time, I just remember that this is for my family.

Migrants may feel disillusioned about their opportunities after relocating, especially when they encounter barriers like the "surge in temporary workers" or the "unexpected steep rise in cost of living," which are common challenges in migration contexts. According to Diener et al. (1985), individuals who face these barriers are more likely to report a discrepancy between their *actual* and *ideal* life, leading to lower satisfaction scores.

Extended separation from their families, combined with a different cultural background, may increase their vulnerability to acculturative stress, depression, anxiety, substance use, and trauma (Smith & Khawaja 2011). This is further exhibited by the gap in answers of the participants who brought their family with them as they pursued education overseas in comparison to those who migrated alone.

7. Employment, Career and Professional Integration

7.1 Temporary Employment Opportunities for Students in English-using Countries

International students play a crucial role in the global knowledge economy, yet their ability to support themselves and integrate socially often depends on the employment opportunities available during their studies. All participants had part-time employment in either the retail, food service, or ride-sharing industries in their destination countries following limitations to working rights:

> Finding a job was challenging, having to submit at least 35 applications and having challenging working hours." (reported by a student in Australia)

Across select English-using countries, regulatory frameworks govern the scope and nature of work permissible for students on temporary visas. These limitations directly influence the types of employment students pursue and their broader integration into host societies.

In the United States, F-1 visa holders are restricted to working a maximum of 20 hours per week during academic sessions, and only in on-campus positions unless authorized under Curricular Practical Training (CPT) or Optional Practical Training (OPT) after completing one academic year. Typical forms of employment include roles as teaching assistants, research assistants, library aides, or positions in campus IT services. These opportunities, while limited in scope, are valued for their alignment with academic institutions and relative ease of access (U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, 2023).

In Canada, international students may work up to 20 hours per week off campus during the academic term and full-time during scheduled breaks, provided they are enrolled full-time at a designated learning institution. Common forms of employment include customer service roles, barista positions, hospitality work, and on-campus support jobs (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024c).

Australia permits international students to work up to 48 hours per fortnight (14 days) during the academic term, with full-time work allowed during official school breaks. For those enrolled in research-based postgraduate programs, work limitations are more flexible. Students often find employment in the retail and hospitality sectors, including positions as servers, kitchen staff, or retail associates. These jobs are typically characterized by high turnover and

low wages, yet they remain critical for students needing income (Australian Trade and Investment Commission, 2024).

In New Zealand, student visa holders are allowed to work up to 20 hours per week during the academic year and full-time during official holidays. The employment landscape mirrors that of Australia, with roles concentrated in the service sector—particularly in food services, tutoring, and freelance tasks (Immigration New Zealand, 2023)

The United Kingdom also enforces a 20-hour-per-week work limit during term time for international students, with full-time employment permitted during vacation periods. Tier 4 (now Student Route) visa regulations specify that employment must not displace domestic labour and cannot involve certain restricted professions (UK Government, 2024).

7.2 Temporary Employment Opportunities for Students in Non-English-using Countries

A common motivation observed from the participants is their belief that there is a higher chance for successful employment during and after their respective programs in countries that have English as their primary language. Out of the 38 countries that are members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 6 have English as their primary official language, namely Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Arguably, five in six of these countries are currently top study destinations.

Despite the offering of various study abroad programs in Western and Southern Europe, the impact of language barriers in countries such as Italy (Ghio, Bratti, & Bignami, 2022), Switzerland (Schmid, 2023), the Netherlands (Yao & Van Ours, 2015), Spain, and Germany (Vasić et al., 2022) remain visible. For every 5 international students, roughly 1 chooses to study in a non-English-using country, while the remaining 4 choose to study in an English-using country (Higuchi et al., 2023). Carlsson et al. (2023) argue that the direct impact of migration to a country where one does not speak the language is directly quantifiable. The impact, such as limited career mobility, potential workplace exploitation, and potential social marginalization of migrants, is evident (Carlsson et al., 2023).

7.2.1 *Limited Career Mobility*

Language proficiency is directly correlated with the ability to access and succeed in professional roles. In Italy, for example, poor command of the host country's language has been shown to limit immigrants' participation in the labour force and confine them to low-mobility jobs. A gap of 25 to 30% is evident in the hourly wages of those who speak the

destination country's language as compared to those who don't (Ghio et al., 2022). Similarly, in Western Europe more broadly, linguistic barriers contribute to pronounced labour market disadvantages, especially among international students and migrants who often cannot compete on equal footing with native speakers (Damelang et al., 2021).

7.2.2 *Potential Workplace Exploitation and Social Marginalization*

In the unique case of Japan, their migration framework has traditionally emphasized strict entry requirements and limited long-term settlement options, particularly for low- and medium-skilled workers. Students often arrive through language schools with hopes to become proficient in Japanese and gain entry to either HEIs or gain work. However, these students find themselves at a disadvantage as the government continues to impose stringent Japanese language proficiency standards for most skilled occupations. This requirement has effectively served as a gatekeeping tool, particularly for international students and temporary migrants, limiting access to institutional resources and downstream opportunities (Hiratsuka, 2016). Consequently, temporary migrants are often disqualified from higher-paying roles regardless of their competencies, reinforcing a system where language, rather than skill, dictates opportunity.

One of the most scrutinized aspects of Japan's foreign temporary labour system is the Technical Intern Training Program (TITP). Originally presented as a skills transfer initiative to aid development in sending countries, TITP has increasingly been criticized for functioning as a de facto labour importation mechanism (Ratnayake, 2017). Temporary migrants, primarily from Southeast Asia, are recruited under the premise of acquiring technical skills but are often placed in repetitive, low-wage, and physically demanding jobs. Due to the structure of the program, where the employer sponsors the visa, participants are left with limited recourse to address unfair treatment or wage suppression. The power imbalance embedded in TITP raises questions about the ethical implications of labour migration disguised as training.

In response to international and domestic criticism of TITP, the Japanese government launched the Specified Skilled Worker (SSW) visa in 2019. This new pathway aims to fill acute labour shortages in 14 designated industries and provides clearer routes to legal employment. However, it still maintains the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) N4 level as a minimum requirement, particularly for SSW-1 applicants (Morita, 2021). While this appears to be a step toward labour market integration, the language requirement continues to filter out otherwise qualified workers, effectively maintaining the stratification of foreign labour based on language rather than actual occupational skills. The arrival of a student in a language school,

completion of a program, and certification of language proficiency in Japan are not guarantees for future success in Japanese society (Alifu et al., 2025).

8. Futures Aspiration and Pathway to Permanent Migration

In a country like the Philippines, where 12% of households have or have had an Overseas Filipino Worker (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024), this is partnered with news that three in ten first-time study permit holders become Canadian permanent residents within 10 years (Choi et al., 2021) It is undeniable that studying, working, and living abroad is still a dream of many.

However, it is important to note that destination countries are tightening the nexus between education and immigration. While they aim to preserve the integrity of temporary migration systems by implementing policies and controls to avoid abuse, governments still aim to separate the thinning fine line between genuine students and those gaming the system by gaining lengthy stays through visas, hoping for socioeconomic purposes. It is important for the prospective educational migrant to consider country-specific policies in planning their study abroad programs.

8.1 Australia

As of July 1, 2024, the Australian government introduced a critical restriction: individuals holding visitor or Temporary Graduate (subclass 485) visas are no longer permitted to apply for a student visa while onshore. Instead, they must depart the country and apply offshore, thus curbing successive transitions between visa types that have allowed individuals to prolong their stay without meeting permanent migration criteria (Australian Department of Home Affairs, 2024a, 2024b). In parallel, the government has proposed placing caps on new international student commencements to alleviate pressure on housing infrastructure and address broader migration management objectives (Australian Department of Education, 2024).

8.2 Canada

Canada's approach has focused on recalibrating its post-study work rights and tightening eligibility criteria. Notably, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada have introduced new requirements for Post-Graduation Work Permit (PGWP) applicants, mandating demonstration of minimum language proficiency in English or French effective from November 2024 (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024b). This ensures that

international graduates are well-prepared for labour market integration and discourages misuse of education pathways for permanent residency without corresponding skills (Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada, 2024b). A provincial nomination program has been put into place, allowing provincial governments to set caps based on capacity and migration targets. Limitations such as granting visas for dependents have also been scrutinized, requiring higher proof of financial capacity and focus on priority study programs.

9. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study highlights the nuanced challenges educational migrants face, particularly those from countries like the Philippines, navigating foreign academic systems and labour markets. While educational migration is framed as a mutually beneficial exchange—providing skilled labour to host countries and human capital development to sending countries—this pathway is vulnerable to exploitation, misrepresentation, and policy loopholes on both ends.

To safeguard migrants while preserving the legitimacy of study-to-migration trajectories, this paper proposes that destination countries enforce the visa process through licensed migration professionals set by destination countries. Host countries like Australia and Canada already have legal frameworks for migration consultancy. However, enforcement remains uneven. This paper recommends a strict policy requiring all student visa applications to be submitted only through government-accredited migration agents (Australia) or authorized immigration consultants (Canada), with clear punitive consequences—such as license suspension or criminal liability—for agents engaged in fraud, document fabrication, or misrepresentation.

This approach creates accountability among intermediaries and offers protection to prospective migrants often unaware of the complexities of immigration law. This approach is also parallel to the model of the United States of America, wherein immigration lawyers are the point of contact for those wishing to lodge temporary, non-immigrant resident visas. New Zealand has been able to raise the bar in 2025 by amending the Immigration Advisers Licensing Act of 2007. "From Monday 31 March 2025, we will decline online applications that have been automatically accepted by our online systems or paper applications if it is confirmed to have been submitted or prepared by, or if the applicant has confirmed to have received advice from, an unlicensed or non-exempt person(s)" (Immigration New Zealand, 2025).

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