

*Attitudes and Preferences of Nursing Undergraduates Towards Working Abroad:
A Cross-Sectional Study in Vietnam*

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study investigates the attitudes of undergraduate nursing students in Vietnam towards international study and work opportunities, as well as the factors influencing their preferences. Data was collected through a web-survey questionnaire in April 2023, targeting students from a university in Vietnam, including participants in the Japanese language special program and regular program. The study findings emphasize the significance of international experiences, particularly in enhancing communication and cross-cultural skills, fostering personal development, and improving career prospects for nursing undergraduates. Moreover, students in the special program revealed distinct preferences when considering their ideal destinations for studying or working abroad. They placed a greater emphasis on factors like a clean and beautiful living environment, long-term job prospects, and festivities. Additionally, for those interested in pursuing postgraduate study abroad, the students favored universities that offered job hunting support, tuition exemption, and modern infrastructure. This study sheds light on the attitudes and preferences of Vietnamese undergraduate nursing students towards international study and work opportunities, highlighting the importance of such experiences for personal growth and career advancement in the nursing profession. The findings carry practical implications for educational institutions and policymakers, emphasizing the need to design programs that cater to the unique needs and preferences of nursing students seeking international opportunities.

Keywords: Nursing Undergraduates, Study Abroad, Preference, Work Abroad

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Introduction

The globalization of education and the job market has opened up new possibilities for undergraduates, especially from developing nations, seeking to explore the international landscape (Tran & Jin, 2021a). The decision to study or work abroad is a complex and multifaceted one, influenced by a myriad of factors, including personal aspirations, family expectations, financial considerations, and the perceived benefits of such experiences (Fakunle, 2021; Hung & Yen, 2020). In an increasingly interconnected world, the importance of international experiences in shaping individuals' personal and professional growth has become evident. The pursuit of study abroad (Salisbury et al., 2009) and work abroad has garnered considerable attention as a means to acquire valuable skills, foster cross-cultural competencies, and broaden horizons.

In the field of nursing, nurse migration is a phenomenon. It is common to observe many nurses migrate from Asian countries (Lorenzo et al., 2007), African countries (Clemens & Pettersson, 2008), to more developed countries. Programs such as EPA are being implemented in Japan to attract foreign nurses so far with some limited outcomes (Lan, 2018), or even disadvantaged for the future of the returnees (Kurniati et al., 2017). Language training and supporting policies are proven to be essential for the successful career of the candidates to be established (Otomo, 2022).

The genesis of this research stems from a noticeable literature gap regarding the attitudes and preferences of undergraduate nursing students in Vietnam toward international study and work prospects. Before engaging in this study, we investigated the concept of study and the intention to work in Japan in different circumstances. In previous papers, we had reported on the situation of Japanese language education in Vietnam (Tran, 2019; Tran & Jin, 2021a), studying in Japan (Tran, 2023; Tran & Jin, 2021b, 2022), and the decision to enroll in the degree programs in Japanese studies (Tran et al., 2023).

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework proposed by the authors based on literature and previous research. Studies have shown that students who have the intention to work abroad, especially those from developing countries, usually choose study abroad as a mediating step to finding work abroad (Baruch et al., 2007). However, in some cases, undergraduates enrolled in specific programs may go for work abroad directly, such as in the field of nursing and caregiving (Ohno, 2012; Ortiga, 2014).

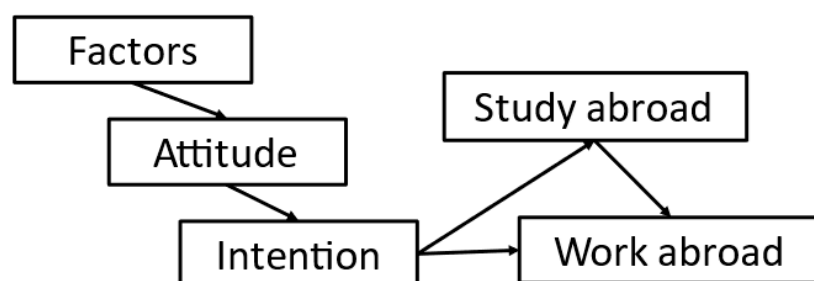


Figure 1. Conceptual framework proposed by the author.

This study is conducted in the context of a university in Vietnam specializing in healthcare (TBUMP, 2023). A foreign language is a mandatory subject in the curriculum. The special Japanese program was established for students who were willing to learn Japanese with the possibility of working in Japan after graduation if they could pass the Japanese language

requirements. Students are required to study English if they are not enrolled in a special program. This study aims to investigate the attitudes of Vietnamese undergraduate nursing students towards studying and working abroad, characteristics of the intended place to go, and the factors which may have influence on the attitude and intention to go abroad.

Methodology

This study employed a cross-sectional research design to investigate the attitudes of undergraduate students towards studying and working abroad. The target population were undergraduate nursing students at TBUMP. Data was collected in April 2023 through a web-survey questionnaire. The web-survey questionnaire was structured to obtain information in several key areas: Demographic information; Attitudes towards study and work abroad: general attitudes towards studying and working abroad, including desired duration of staying abroad; Preferred destination attributes. The questionnaire used five-level Likert-style questions from 1 to 5, where 1 stands for strongly disagree, 2 for disagree, 3 for neutral, 4 for agree, and 5 for strongly agree. The data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics. Participants were provided with information about the study's purpose, their voluntary participation, and the confidentiality and anonymity of their responses.

Results

There were 147 respondents participating in the study. All participants were undergraduate students at a university in Vietnam, majoring in nursing, and were unmarried. The individual demographic characteristics (6 items). The average age of the students is 20.05 years, with a standard deviation of 1.43. Among the students, 91.2% are female, and 8.8% are male. The students are distributed across different academic years: 1st year 37.4%, 2nd year 26.5%, 3rd year 21.8%, 4th year 14.3%. There are international students (10.9%) and local students (89.1%). The students live in dormitory 21.1%, rental room 63.3%, and own home 15.6%. A third of the respondents were living alone (36.7%), while 48.3% were living with roommates, and 15.0% were living with family. The distribution of participants' family characteristics (4 items) is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Family characteristics of participants.

Variable	Value	Total	
		<i>n</i>	%
Parents' highest education level	High school and below	122	83.0
	Undergraduate	25	17.0
Study abroad experience of family members	In Japan	19	12.9
	Not in Japan	5	3.4
	None	123	83.7
Hometown	Capital	5	3.4
	Provincial city	37	25.2
	Other	105	71.4
Perceived family income	High	2	1.4
	Mid	97	66.0
	Low	48	32.7

Table 2 shows the perceived importance of study abroad experiences in five categories: communication skills, cross-cultural competency, personal development, future income, and future career. The mean scores for each category indicate that communication skills and

cross-cultural competency are considered the most important aspects, with mean ratings of 3.70 and 3.64, respectively. Personal development follows closely with a mean rating of 3.54. Future income and Future career are perceived as relatively less important, with mean ratings of 3.40 and 3.22, respectively.

Table 2. Perceived importance of study abroad.

Important for	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Communication skills	3.70	4.00	4	0.96
Cross-cultural competency	3.64	4.00	4	0.91
Personal development	3.54	4.00	4	0.90
Future income	3.40	3.00	3	0.96
Future career	3.22	3.00	3	0.89

Figure 2 shows over two thirds of the respondents reported a desire to work abroad for a maximum of five years, while only 8% wanted to work longer than 10 years.

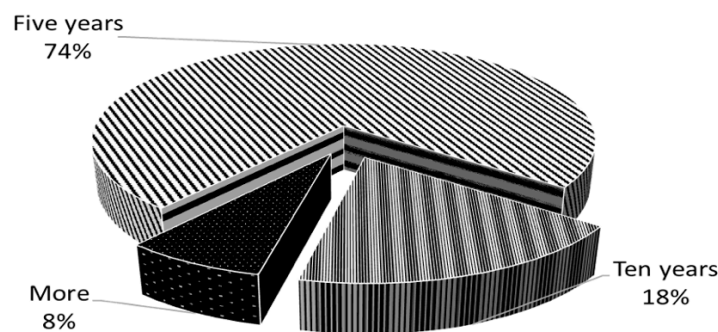


Figure 2. Duration wanted to work abroad.

Table 3 shows the location preferences for studying or working abroad. The results suggest that students generally have stronger preferences for locations with attributes such as beautiful and clean mature environments, potential long-term job opportunities, local festivals, plenty of part-time job options, tourist spots, a low cost of living in suburban areas, and friendly rural settings compared to regular students. Preference for locations with plenty of compatriots, relatives or friends were not very high.

Table 3. Location of preference for studying or working abroad.

Feature	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Beautiful and clean nature	3.71	4	4	0.88
Potential long-term job	3.62	4	4	0.81
Local festivals	3.56	4	4	0.83
Plenty of compatriots	3.52	4	4	0.80
Plenty of part-time job	3.50	3	3	0.81
Tourist spot	3.44	3	3	0.78
Having relatives or friends	3.41	3	3	0.85
Low cost of living sub-urban	3.37	3	3	0.83
Friendly rural	3.37	3	3	0.78

The data in Table 4 presents the preferences of respondents regarding specific factors related to their preferred university abroad. The data shows that students generally have stronger preferences for universities abroad that provide tuition exemption, job hunting support,

modern infrastructure, scholarships for international students, life support and counseling services, local culture events, exchange opportunities with local and international students. The following features are moderately desired: high employment rates, dormitory facilities, free language classes, student clubs they desire, disaster prevention activities, study courses they desire. Surprisingly, features such as English-speaking environment, high rankings, national university status, offer EMI courses, or have Nobel laureates seem have less meaning for the respondents.

Table 4. University of preference abroad.

	Mean	Median	Mode	SD
Tuition exemption	3.59	4	4	0.88
Job hunting support	3.57	4	4	0.86
Modern infrastructure	3.53	4	3	0.93
Scholarship for int'l students	3.50	3	3	0.85
Life support & counseling	3.50	3	3	0.88
Local culture events	3.48	4	4	0.86
Exchange with local student	3.48	4	4	0.83
High employment rate	3.46	3	3	0.89
Having dormitory	3.46	3	3	0.85
Exchange with int'l students	3.46	3	3	0.82
Free language class	3.45	3	3	0.86
Having student clubs wanted	3.44	3	3	0.83
Disaster prevention activities	3.41	3	3	0.80
Having study course wanted	3.37	3	3	0.85
English speaking medium	3.28	3	3	0.82
High ranking	3.18	3	3	0.79
National university	3.10	3	3	0.76
Having EMI courses	3.05	3	3	0.82
Having Nobel laureates	2.94	3	3	0.82

Discussion

The present study investigates the attitudes of undergraduate nursing students in Vietnam regarding international study and work opportunities offers a comprehensive understanding of their aspirations and preferences. The study's findings underscore the transformative potential of international experiences in the nursing education landscape. These findings, particularly within the context of the distinctive Japanese language special program, have implications for both educational institutions and policy development.

The study revealed perceptions about essential role of international experiences in augmenting communication skills, cross-cultural competencies, and personal development among nursing undergraduates (O'Brien et al., 2021). The recognition of these attributes' significance highlights the comprehensive nature of nursing education, aligning students' skills with the evolving demands of the global healthcare environment. This empirical evidence may add values for educational institutions in developing countries aiming to prepare nursing students to thrive in diverse healthcare settings (Chen et al., 2020) based on race-ethnicity and country of origin (Allensworth-Davies et al., 2007).

The distinct preferences exhibited by students within the special Japanese program add an intriguing layer to the discourse. While the government-supported EPA program may not be seen as sustainable in the long run (Ogawa, 2012), other initiatives may survive and thrive (Asato, 2012). The students emphasize factors such as a pristine living environment, enduring

job prospects, and cultural festivities when contemplating international destinations. This holistic approach, emphasizing both personal and professional dimensions, underscores the interdisciplinary nature of nursing and the potential for international experiences to shape well-rounded healthcare professionals. Nevertheless, evidence has shown that foreign nurses in Japan face various challenges and difficulties, even after they return to their home countries (Abuliezi et al., 2021). The students who are prepared to head abroad may need to know and to be prepared mentally and to be trained to deal with actual issues. If the special programs could solve these issues, it may improve the sustainability of the human resources and wellbeing of foreign-educated nurses in Japan.

While nursing students in developed countries may enroll in short-term study abroad (Abuliezi et al., 2021), the chance seems very rare for students in developing countries to join such a program. The findings of the current study show that the preferences of students interested in study abroad, which in fact a postgraduate study, paint a picture of pragmatism, with a focus on institutions offering robust job-hunting support, tuition benefits, and modern infrastructure. This strategic approach aligns education with future employability, revealing students' awareness of the pivotal connection between academic pursuits and professional prospects.

Certain limitations need to be considered. The scarcity and uniqueness of the Japanese program highlight the challenge of recruiting participants, thus underscoring the limitation imposed by program availability on the generalizability of the study's findings. The cross-sectional design may overlook the evolution over time. The single-university focus might limit generalizability. Reliance on web-survey data could introduce selection bias and miss in-depth insights. Therefore, this study's limitations emphasize the potential for refined research to shape a comprehensive narrative around nursing students' global aspirations.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the literature on nursing education and global experiences by shedding light on the attitudes and preferences of Vietnamese undergraduate nursing students. By emphasizing the substantial impact of international experiences on communication skills, cross-cultural competencies, personal growth, and career prospects, the study underscores the transformative potential of such encounters. The revelations from the special Japanese program participants and the preferences of those aspiring for postgraduate study abroad add depth to the discourse. Ultimately, the findings resonate with practical implications, advocating for a tailored approach to program design and policy formulation that caters to the evolving aspirations of nursing students within the global context.

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