

BRIDGING CULTURES: ANALYZING THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CULTURAL ADAPTATION, JOB SATISFACTION, AND CULTURAL COMPETENCE AMONG FILIPINO NURSES OVERSEAS

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Abstract

Background: The Philippines continues to face a critical nursing shortage despite producing a large number of nursing graduates annually. More than 85,000 Filipino nurses migrated overseas between 2018 and 2023, driven by higher compensation, career advancement opportunities, and improved working conditions abroad. However, overseas nurses experience varying degrees of cultural adaptation, which may influence their job satisfaction and cultural competence. While cultural adaptation is essential for effective integration into multicultural healthcare settings, limited research has examined its relationship with job satisfaction and cultural competence among Filipino nurses working overseas. This study addresses this gap by investigating how cultural adaptation interacts with job satisfaction and cultural competence to support the well-being and professional effectiveness of Filipino nurses abroad.

Methods: A quantitative correlational research design was employed involving 160 Filipino Registered Nurses working in clinical settings in Saudi Arabia and the United States. Respondents were selected through quota sampling and surveyed using three standardized instruments measuring cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence. Data were collected through an online structured questionnaire and analyzed using descriptive statistics and correlation analyses to determine associations among socio-demographic characteristics and the key study variables.

Results: Findings revealed moderate levels of cultural adaptation and cultural competence, alongside high job satisfaction, particularly in pay, promotion, and coworker relationships. Age and years of overseas experience demonstrated the strongest associations with cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence. Significant positive correlations were found among cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence, indicating that nurses who adapt more effectively tend to experience greater job satisfaction and demonstrate stronger cultural competence. Overall, results underscore the importance of cultural orientation, communication training, and supportive work environments to enhance the well-being and professional performance of overseas Filipino nurses.

Keywords: Cultural Adaptation, Job Satisfaction, Cultural Competence, Overseas Filipino Nurses, Migration.

Introduction

Despite producing a large number of nursing graduates annually, the Philippines continues to experience a critical shortage of nurses due to high rates of overseas migration. According to national data, more than 85,000 Filipino nurses left the country between 2018 and 2023, with an average of over 10,000 nurses deployed abroad each year (DOH, 2024; POEA, 2023). Migration has become a dominant career aspiration among Filipino nurses, with over 80% considering overseas employment as part of their long-term plans (Elmaco, 2022).

Although licensure examination passing rates remain high, local healthcare facilities operate with severe understaffing. Reports indicate that many public hospitals function with only half of the required nursing workforce, and nurse-to-patient ratios far exceed international standards (DOH Regional Reports, 2023).

High attrition rates are attributed to low compensation, heavy workloads, limited career development opportunities, and poor work-life balance (Alibudbud, 2022; Sapar & Oducado, 2021). Consequently, job satisfaction among Filipino nurses working overseas is significantly higher compared to those who remain in the country (Oducado, 2020; Emerson et al., 2020).

While international employment improves financial stability, Filipino nurses face substantial challenges in cultural adaptation due to limited preparatory training and differences in healthcare systems, workplace culture, and social norms (Lorenzo et al., 2020). These challenges may influence both job satisfaction and cultural competence, making cultural adaptation a critical concern in the global migration of Filipino nurses (Matsuno, 2020).

This study therefore aims to examine the relationship between cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence among Filipino nurses educated in the Philippines and currently working overseas, to inform interventions that support their professional well-being and effectiveness.

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Methods

Research Design

The study utilized a quantitative, correlational research design to determine the relationships among socio-demographic characteristics, cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence of Filipino nurses working overseas. Data were collected through structured survey questionnaires and analyzed using statistical methods without manipulating any variables, making the approach appropriate for examining naturally occurring associations in real-world settings.

Respondents of the Study

The respondents consisted of 160 Filipino Registered Nurses currently employed in clinical settings in Saudi Arabia and the United States. Participants were graduates of Philippine nursing institutions, held valid Philippine RN licenses, and were recruited using quota sampling to ensure representation from both host countries. Nurses working in non-clinical roles, employed outside the target countries, or those who submitted incomplete questionnaires were excluded from the study.

Instruments of the Study

Data were gathered using a structured self-administered questionnaire composed of sections measuring respondents' socio-demographic profiles, cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence. The survey instrument enabled systematic and quantitative assessment of the key variables, providing measurable data for statistical analysis and correlation testing.

This study employed three standardized instruments to measure cultural adaptation, job satisfaction, and cultural competence among Filipino nurses working overseas. Data were collected through an online, self-administered questionnaire structured into clearly labeled sections with progress indicators to minimize survey fatigue. Respondents were allowed to pause and resume the survey, which required approximately 15–20 minutes to complete.

A pilot test was conducted with ten Filipino nurses not included in the final sample to ensure clarity, relevance, and feasibility of the instruments. Minor revisions were made based on participant feedback. Formal permissions to use all instruments were obtained from the original authors, with documentation included in the study appendices.

Results

The findings show that the overseas Filipino nursing workforce in this study is predominantly young, single, and early in their international careers. Most respondents were aged 21–30 years (65.6%), followed by 31–40 years (23.1%), indicating that overseas employment is largely pursued by early-

career nurses. A majority were single (70.6%), reinforcing the pattern that younger, unattached professionals are more inclined toward migration. In terms of sex, female nurses comprised 56.3% of the sample, while male nurses accounted for 41.9%, reflecting increasing gender diversity in overseas nursing. Slightly more respondents were employed in the United States (53.1%) than in Saudi Arabia (46.9%), with most working in government/public (49.4%) and private hospitals (36.9%). Additionally, more than three-fourths of respondents (76.9%) had five years or less overseas nursing experience, indicating that many were still in the early stages of international practice.

Across all dimensions, cultural adaptation was rated at a moderate level. Interpersonal communication showed a weighted mean of 3.23, indicating functional but limited ability in social interaction, nonverbal interpretation, and culturally appropriate communication, with particular challenges noted in interacting with the opposite sex and participating in social events. Academic/work performance also registered a moderate level (weighted mean = 3.50), suggesting that while nurses were generally effective in teamwork and task management, they experienced difficulties in culturally appropriate self-expression and performance feedback. Personal interests and community involvement likewise yielded a moderate rating (weighted mean = 3.24), with nurses maintaining personal hobbies but demonstrating limited engagement in community activities and challenges in navigating bureaucracy.

The results suggest that while overseas Filipino nurses are able to function competently in their professional roles, cultural adaptation remains incomplete, particularly in communication, social integration, and community participation. These findings highlight the critical need for structured orientation programs, mentorship, communication training, and institutional support systems to strengthen cultural adaptation, enhance professional performance, and support the well-being of Filipino nurses in multicultural healthcare environments.

The results indicate that respondents demonstrated a moderate level of cultural adaptation in both ecological adaptation and language proficiency. In terms of ecological adaptation, the overall weighted mean was 3.21, reflecting moderate adjustment to environmental conditions in the host country. Respondents showed better adaptation to the pace of life and orientation within their surroundings, while greater difficulty was reported in adapting to neighborhood noise and population density. These findings suggest that although overseas Filipino nurses are generally able to adjust to their physical and social environments, certain ecological stressors remain challenging.

Similarly, language proficiency was rated at a moderate level with a weighted mean of 3.17. Respondents reported slightly higher competence in understanding and speaking the host language than in reading and writing, indicating functional but not advanced language skills. This suggests that while daily communication is manageable, language remains an important area for further development, especially in professional and formal contexts.

In contrast, findings on job satisfaction revealed generally high levels of satisfaction, particularly in terms of pay and promotion. Job satisfaction related to pay obtained a high weighted mean of 3.80, with respondents expressing strong satisfaction with salary fairness and opportunities for salary increases, although feelings of appreciation linked to compensation were rated only moderate. Likewise, satisfaction with promotion opportunities was high, with a weighted mean of 3.89, indicating that respondents perceived fair chances for career advancement and merit-based promotion, despite some lingering concerns about limited opportunities for all employees.

This study shows a clear pattern wherein overseas Filipino nurses experience moderate cultural and language adaptation alongside high job satisfaction, particularly in financial compensation and career advancement. These findings highlight the need for strengthened support mechanisms - such as cultural orientation, environmental adjustment assistance, and language training - to complement favorable employment conditions and enhance long-term adaptation and well-being.

The results of the study indicate that overseas Filipino nurses experience moderate cultural adaptation and cultural competence, alongside generally high job satisfaction, with significant relationships observed among these key variables.

In terms of job satisfaction, respondents reported high satisfaction with pay, promotion opportunities, fringe benefits, coworker relationships, and the nature of work, suggesting that financial rewards, career advancement, positive peer interactions, and meaningful work strongly contribute to overall satisfaction. Conversely, moderate satisfaction was observed in supervision, contingent rewards, operating conditions, and communication, highlighting concerns related to recognition, workload, administrative demands, and clarity of organizational communication.

With respect to cultural competence, respondents demonstrated a moderate level of cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, and cultural skills. While nurses showed openness to cultural differences, respectful behavior, and adaptability,

lower scores were noted in areas such as challenging discrimination, seeking opportunities for cultural growth, and deeper reflection on privilege and social justice. These findings suggest a foundational level of competence that requires further development through targeted training and experiential learning.

Correlation analyses revealed that age and years of overseas experience were the most influential socio-demographic variables across outcomes. Experience, in particular, showed significant positive relationships with all domains of cultural adaptation, job satisfaction (specifically pay, supervision, and fringe benefits), and cultural competence, underscoring the role of prolonged exposure and professional immersion in cross-cultural environments. Other socio-demographic factors - such as sex, country of employment, marital status, and institution type - showed weak or non-significant associations.

Strong and statistically significant relationships were found between cultural adaptation and job satisfaction, with better adaptation - especially in interpersonal communication, ecological adaptation, and language proficiency - associated with higher satisfaction across all job-related domains. Similarly, cultural adaptation was strongly correlated with cultural competence, indicating that nurses who adapt more effectively socially, linguistically, and environmentally also demonstrate higher cultural awareness, knowledge, and skills.

Finally, a moderate-to-strong positive relationship was identified between job satisfaction and cultural competence, with pay and promotion emerging as the strongest predictors. This suggests that supportive work environments, fair compensation, and career opportunities not only improve satisfaction but also foster cultural sensitivity and professional effectiveness.

Conclusion

The findings emphasize that experience-driven cultural adaptation and supportive workplace conditions are central to enhancing both job satisfaction and cultural competence among overseas Filipino nurses. These results highlight the need for organizational strategies that integrate fair employment practices with cultural training, mentorship, and effective communication systems to support long-term adjustment, well-being, and professional excellence.

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Conflicts of Interest

The author declares that there is no significant competing financial, professional, or personal interests that might have influenced the performance or presentation of the work described in this manuscript.

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