



Barriers and Facilitators of Nursing Graduates Working Abroad: Study Descriptive

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ABSTRACT

Transformation of Health Human Resources within the Ministry of Health can be carried out by improving the quality of health human resources. Problem identification consists of needs, availability and distribution, and the quality of health worker graduates. The number of nursing graduates exceeds the number of available nursing jobs. One of the efforts the government can make is to provide motivation for nursing graduates to work both at home and abroad. This study aimed to identify the factors that inhibit and support nursing graduates in Riau Province from working abroad. The research method was a descriptive survey with a cross-sectional study approach. The researcher asked questions through a Google form that had been tested for validity tests on 2024 nursing graduates in Riau Province. Data Analysis uses the distribute of interest of overseas graduates and the inhibiting and supporting factors. The study results showed that 70.5% of respondents were interested in working abroad. The highest-ranking facilitators or supporting factors were large salary and benefits (63.1%), international experience (50.2%), and career path (33.3%). However, the barrier factors were Minimal Language Proficiency (58.1%), Away from Family (49.7%), and Not Getting Family Permission (33.2%). High interest in working abroad is tempered by a readiness gap characterized by language limitations, family constraints, and regulatory unfamiliarity. Enhancing destination-oriented language training, integrating family engagement strategies, and providing regulatory guidance are essential to increase international deployment of Indonesian nursing graduates.

Keywords: barriers factors; nursing graduates; supporting factors; working abroad

INTRODUCTION

The global nursing workforce faces a critical shortfall, with an estimated need for 15 million nurses by 2030 to ensure sustainable healthcare delivery (Stievano, Alvarez, & Shaffer, 2022). The Western Pacific region alone requires 8.63 million nurses, followed by Southeast Asia (2 million), the Americas (2.54 million), the Eastern Mediterranean (1.59 million), and Europe (1.35 million). These shortages are exacerbated by population ageing, increased healthcare demands, and the enduring impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, leading to intensified international competition for foreign-educated nurses (Garcia-Dia, 2022). As high-income countries actively recruit to fill workforce gaps, ethical concerns arise regarding sustainability and workforce depletion in source countries (Sheehy, Fraser, Cheney, & Bloomfield, 2025).

International nurse migration has become a strategic response to this crisis. The recruitment of internationally educated nurses (IENs) provides immediate relief to understaffed healthcare systems, particularly in high-income countries where disparities in wages and work conditions drive active cross-border recruitment (Smith, Herinek, Woodward-Kron, & Ewers, 2022). While this inflow enhances service quality in receiving countries, it also raises ethical questions related to "brain drain"

from low- and middle-income nations such as Indonesia, where the departure of trained professionals may weaken local healthcare capacity (Adam, Nelson, Salami, Grundy, & Osman, 2025). To address these concerns, global strategies emphasize ethical recruitment, mutual benefits, and support systems for professional integration (Peter, 2023).

Indonesian nurses have great opportunities to work overseas. Based on the pocketbook of the utilization of nurses abroad, it is estimated that the supply and demand of nurses worldwide will reach 15 million by 2030. The Western Pacific region needs approximately 8.63 million nurses, Southeast Asia needs 2 million nurses, Europe needs 1.35 million nurses, The Eastern Mediterranean needs 1.59 million nurses, and the Americas need 2.54 million nurses. A report by the International Council of Nurses in 2023 revealed that after the Covid-19 pandemic, many countries in Asia and Southeast Asia have a shortage of nurses, except for Indonesia, which has a surplus of nurses. The number of nurses in Indonesia currently reaches 1.32 million, and there are only 676,841 nurses with Registration Certificates who are still active (Purnama, 2023). The Chairman of DPP PPNI explained that the number of nursing study programs in Indonesia is 983, consisting of 474 Diploma III study programs, 53 Diploma IV study programs, 363 undergraduate study programs (nurses), eight nursing master's study programs, and two nursing doctoral study programs. The average number of graduates per year is 63,000 people who pass a competency test (Sejati, 2024).

According to data from the Indonesian Migrant Workers Protection Agency (BP2MI) in 2023, the demand for health workers from 2021 to 2023 amounted to 7568 people, mainly from the Netherlands, Kuwait, Qatar, Romania, Saudi Arabia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the United Arab Emirates (BP2MI, 2023). In Singapore, the need for nurses reached 5100 people but only 37.2% was met. This explains that the shortage of nurses results in a high demand for labor; one of the causes is the phenomenon of population ageing that has been experienced by developed countries, so that they need nurses and caregivers, especially for elderly nursing. This shows that both developing and developed countries are still experiencing a shortage of nurses, but the interest in Indonesian nursing graduates abroad is still low at around 2%, which can be caused by one of them being away from family (Sejati, 2024). According to the Central Statistics Agency data from 2023, there are currently 582,023 nurses in Indonesia. In Riau Province, there are 12,185 registered nurses (BPS, 2024). Most of the approximately 90% of graduate nurses in Indonesia are absorbed even before they graduate, so the waiting period for nurse graduates in some institutions in general is less than three months, and they immediately get a job in hospitals, clinics, and other doctors' practices. Based on data from the Indonesian Health Workers Council (KTKI) in 2023, there are 1.32 million nurses in Indonesia, but only 676,841 have an Active Registration Certificate (STR) (Sejati, 2024). However, referring to the data of nursing graduates who experience a surplus is a long-term problem due to the increasing number of nurse-producing institutions in the country.

Based on the records of the Ministry of Health, in 2021, there was a surplus of nurses reaching 176,470, and this is expected to increase every year. To help the government overcome the problem of surplus nurses, one solution is to send nurses who have graduated from nursing study programs in Indonesia to help solve the problems currently faced by several countries. Riau Province has several nursing-producing study programs owned by both the government and the private sector. The average number of nursing graduates every year reaches 1000, including both vocational and professional nurses. To meet the target of nursing graduates working abroad as the main performance index of agencies under the Ministry of Health, it is necessary to identify the interests and supporting factors, as well as barriers to graduates working abroad.

Interest is one of the dimensions of the affective aspect that plays a significant role in a person's life. The affective aspect identifies the emotional dimension of emotional awareness, disposition, and will that affect a person's thoughts and actions. Work interest can be influenced by job satisfaction; the higher a person's interest in work, the higher their job satisfaction. The effective contribution of interest in work and job satisfaction was 62.8%, which means that work causes satisfaction due to individuals interest in work. A person is required to have an interest in something he is doing because

interest plays an important role in shaping individual attitudes and behaviours (Puspitasari & Saputra, 2021). Several studies related to interest have explained that interest is influenced by the field of study undertaken. If the interest in the Field of Nursing Studies is large, the interest in the work will also be strong (Raura, Abd, & Husen, 2018). In addition to interest, the choice to work abroad is influenced by various other factors, one of which is the factor of offering attractive income levels and facilities compared to working domestically (Rahmany, 2018).

For this reason, it is hoped that this research can provide basic data for developing strategies to accelerate the handling of surplus problems in the country and overcome the shortage of nurses abroad. The incentive factor is support for working abroad. One of the crucial reasons is the low wages and well-being of nurses in the country compared to overseas offers who are forced to leave their families and hometowns for better well-being (Unjani, 2024). This study aimed to identify the factors that inhibit and support nursing graduates in Riau Province from working abroad.

METHOD

This quantitative research uses a descriptive survey to determine the interests and factors that support and inhibit the desire of graduates to work abroad. The population comprised all nursing students at the final level in Riau Province. The sampling technique used is accidental sampling by paying attention to the criteria that nursing students are at the final level of the lecture level, are in Riau Province, and are willing to become respondents. The number of respondents in this study was 309. Data were collected using a Google form containing interests and factors that affect the desire to work abroad. Before the instrument is administered to the respondents, its validity and reliability will be tested. The validity test was conducted on 50 respondents using Pearson Product moment with the r table at Sig 5% being 0,279. The 14 question items have an $R - \text{count}$ of 0,501, so all questions are valid. The Reliability test was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha with a result of 0,88.

RESULT

Nurses' Interest In Working Abroad

Interest is a person's desire to do something. This desire can be influenced by supporting and inhibiting factors in obtaining desires.

Table 1.
Nurse Interest in Working Abroad

No	Variable	Frequency
1	Interested in Working Abroad	217 (70,5%)
2	Not Interested	92 (29,5%)

Based on the table above, 217 (70.5%) respondents were interested in working abroad. The factors for interest in working abroad were as follows:

Table 2.
The Factors that affect interest in working abroad

Variable	Factors	Sub Variable	Frequency
<i>Facilitators/ Supporting Factors</i>	Internal Factors	The Desire to Improve Family Well-Being	93 (33,3%)
		The Desire to Work While Pursuing Education Abroad	72 (26,5%)
		Desire to Gain International Experience	140 (50,2%)
	External Factors	Developing Target Country Language Skills	63 (22,6%)
		Salary + Large Allowance	176 (63,1%)
		Relative Support (Parents, Family and Friends)	39 (14%)
		Cultural Exposure	35 (12,5%)
<i>Barriers/ Inhibitory Factors</i>	/	Career Path	93 (33,3%)
		Emotional and Psychological Barriers Living Away from Family	148 (49,7%)
		Not Getting Family Permission	99 (33,2%)
		Minimal Language Proficiency	173 (58,1%)
		Ignorance of flows and regulations	97 (32,6%)
		Fear	27 (9,1%)
		The difficulty of passing the Competency Test	58 (19,5%)

Based on the table above, it can be seen that most of the internal supporting factors are the desire to gain international experience. This shows that international experience is a strong motivation for working abroad. Based on the table above, it can be seen that the external factors that support most of them are the large salary and benefits to work abroad, namely, 176 respondents (63.1%). This shows that the main goal of working abroad is to earn a bigger salary than in the home country. The table above shows that the factors inhibiting nursing graduates from working abroad are minimal foreign language competence (173 respondents, 58.1%), being far from family (148 respondents, 49.7%), and not getting permission from their families (99 respondents, 33.2%). This shows that the main inhibiting factor is foreign language competence, according to the destination country. However, this language can still be modified by providing a language curriculum based on the destination country. In connection with minimal language competence, the researcher identified the language that the respondents mastered, as shown in the following table:

Table 5.
 Language Competencies that are currently mastered

No	Language Competence	Frequency
1	English	145 (56,9%)
2	Arabic	13 (5,1%)
3	Japanese	13 (5,1%)
4	Bahasa Thailand	1 (0,4%)
5	Korean	1 (0,4%)
6	Russian	1 (0,4%)

Based on their language competence, most of the respondents mastered English, namely 145 respondents (56.9%).

Table 6.
 Positive Impacts and Negative Impacts of Working Abroad

Impact	Descriptive	Very Agree	Agree	Disagree
Positive Impact	1. International Competency Enhancement	168	139	0
	2. Increasing the Absorption of Nursing Graduates Working Abroad	152	151	4
	3. Increase in Income and Living Standards	145	151	12
	4. Career Progression	170	134	4
	5. Increasing the country's foreign exchange	122	167	17
Negative Impact	1. Culture Shock (Food, Culture, Traditions)	71	192	43
	2. Time Difference with Destination Country	61	189	54
	3. Security Guarantee	71	168	69

Based on the table 6, it can be seen that the perception of nursing graduates choosing the positive impact of working abroad is the most for individuals is career progression, International. Competency Enhancement, while for the government it is an increase in the absorption of nursing graduates who work abroad. Meanwhile, the negative impact according to the perception of nursing graduates is Culture Shock that must be faced when abroad.

Table 7.
 Culture Shock

Variable	Factors	Sub Variable	Frequency
<i>Facilitators/ Supporting Factors</i>	Internal Factors	The Desire to Improve Family Well-Being	93 (33,3%)
		The Desire to Work While Pursuing Education Abroad	72 (26,5%)
		Desire to Gain International Experience	140 (50,2%)
		Developing Target Country Language Skills	63 (22,6%)
	External Factors	Salary + Large Allowance	176 (63,1%)
		Relative Support (Parents, Family and Friends)	39 (14%)
		Cultural Exposure	35 (12,5%)
		Career Path	93 (33,3%)
<i>Barriers / Inhibitory Factors</i>		Emotional and Psychological Barriers Living Away from Family	148 (49,7%)
		Not Getting Family Permission	99 (33,2%)
		Minimal Language Proficiency	173 (58,1%)
		Ignorance of flows and regulations	97 (32,6%)
		Fear	27 (9,1%)
		The difficulty of passing the Competency Test	58 (19,5%)

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal important insights into the facilitators and barriers shaping nursing graduates' interest in working abroad, with implications for policy design, curriculum reform, and international nurse deployment strategies. The most significant challenges to overseas employment were related to family dynamics, language readiness, emotional resilience, and procedural unfamiliarity, while the most compelling motivations included economic incentives, international experience, and professional growth.

One of the most dominant inhibiting factors identified was limited foreign language proficiency, reported by 173 respondents (58.1%). Despite English being the most common foreign language competency (145 respondents; 56.9%), mastery of other key destination languages—such as Arabic, Japanese, Korean, and Russian—was significantly limited. This finding aligns with prior studies emphasizing that language readiness is a core determinant of nurses' ability to deliver safe, culturally competent care in international settings (Dajang, Bwai, & Yulian, 2025). As such, the integration of destination-oriented language instruction into nursing curricula, including elective or mandatory modules, is essential to enhance global readiness and employment competitiveness (Gillispie, 2021).

The second major barrier was family-related constraints, including lack of permission to migrate (33.2%) and emotional concerns about separation, homesickness, and anxiety (reported by 49.7%). These constraints reinforce the importance of structured family engagement in preparing graduates for international work transitions. Family approval remains a pivotal factor in students' decision-making, particularly in collectivist cultures where familial influence is central to career trajectories (Alboelola, et al., 2025). Socialization strategies that involve families in career preparation processes may reduce emotional resistance and strengthen psychological readiness.

A third important deterrent was the lack of knowledge regarding overseas procedures and regulations, reported by 97 respondents (32.6%). This barrier reflects broader systemic opacity surrounding licensure, credential recognition, and administrative processes in destination countries. Previous research demonstrates that complex regulatory pathways and credential verification often deter internationally educated nurses from pursuing overseas work, contributing to professional underemployment or deskilling (Cubelo, Jabri, Jokiniemi, & Turunen, 2024). Regulatory transparency and pre-departure orientation programs can help address these challenges.

Respondents also highlighted culture shock and acculturation stress as relevant risks associated with migration. Aspects such as differences in food, customs, communication norms, and healthcare practices can induce emotional strain. These findings echo studies emphasizing that cultural adaptation is a significant challenge for migrant nurses (Oliva, Gomez, & Novo, 2025). Targeted cultural orientation, mentoring systems, and community-based support structures are essential to mitigate these impacts and enhance resilience (Pressley, et al., 2024).

On the facilitating side, economic incentives were the most frequently reported motivators, with 63.1% of respondents citing large salaries and benefits as reasons for seeking employment abroad. This result supports previous studies indicating that income differentials remain the strongest pull factor in health worker migration (Khan, Parveen, & Bano, 2025). Moreover, international career pathways were also considered attractive, with 50.2% citing the desire for international experience and 33.3% noting access to clearer career development trajectories. These findings reaffirm that migration is not only economically motivated but also driven by professional advancement goals (Liu, Zeng, Tang, Qi, & Wang, 2025).

In addition, the potential for skills upgrading and exposure to advanced technologies in destination countries was considered an added benefit of migration. Respondents viewed overseas work as a mechanism for enhancing their nursing competencies, global employability, and overall professionalism. This aligns with literature suggesting that international placements serve as strategic investments in human capital development (Luan, 2025).

Attempting to speak another language allows you to engage with colleagues in your short-term home in a more meaningful and immediate way. It has also been shown to have cognitive benefits too. People who speak more than one language have improved critical thinking skills, problem Solving Skills, and Memory (Allianz, 2026). The availability of destination-country language skills (e.g., English, Arabic, Japanese) directly impacts readiness for migration. Simultaneously, family permission and emotional readiness—especially among female graduates—are recognized as pivotal constraints (Mojini, 2024).

Collectively, these findings point to the need for comprehensive migration readiness programs in nursing education. Such programs should combine: Language training aligned with destination-country demands, Family engagement modules to support psychosocial transitions, Cultural orientation and mentorship systems, and Clear guidance on licensure, registration, and credential recognition procedures. The successful implementation of these programs could reduce barriers, increase confidence, and convert high interest into actual overseas deployment. Finally, these strategies will contribute to optimizing Indonesia's surplus nurse workforce for ethical, sustainable international mobility in line with global demand and professional development objectives.

CONCLUSION

This study confirms that a significant proportion of nursing graduates in Riau Province are interested in pursuing overseas employment, driven by economic and career development incentives. However, this interest is constrained by substantial readiness barriers, particularly in language proficiency, family approval, and regulatory knowledge.

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