

## **Socio-Economic Employment Status of Filipino Migrants in Australia: Implications to Philippine College Education**

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**Abstract** - The study aimed to describe the socio-economic and employment status of Filipino migrants in Australia and its implications to college education. It utilized qualitative descriptive method of research involving 114 Filipino migrants in Australia as selected respondents through purposive sampling technique. The Filipino migrant workers were basically in their prime to meet the challenge of professional life and employment demands of the Australian labor market; they were into every kind of jobs – be it professional type of job or white collar jobs, or plain blue collar work. Computer literacy is one important job requirement in Australia. Those who migrated to Australia had realized their aspiration for a better life in that country. Foreigners who look for jobs in Australia would not encounter problem or difficulty as they are assured of job placements before they leave the country of origin. Australia is the land of promise for most Filipino migrants who migrated to the country in search for better job opportunities. College degree from the Philippines is not a guarantee of a better job in Australia as its standard of quality education starts from the basic education level.

**Keywords** - socio-economic, employment, migrants

## INTRODUCTION

The Filipinos are everywhere in the globe and they always survive the heat of the Middle East, the winters of North American countries, the dangers in Africa, and the attack of deadly insects in New Guinea. They are everywhere outside the Philippines in search of better job opportunities for a good life. Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) have been tagged as the new Filipino heroes for they share to Philippine treasury part of their earnings to the dwindling reserves of U.S. dollars and they are now considered the highest contributors to national treasury to meet the country's fiscal deficits.

Lately, that Filipinos discover job opportunities are many and richer in Australia than in any part of North America judging from the latest trend of migrant Filipino workers going abroad. It was in 1970, that a large scale migration of Filipinos to Australia commenced after the end of the infamous "White Australia Policy". (Jupp, 1991). With the majority of Filipinos arriving in the 1980s peaking between 1987-1988 that Census of 1991 recorded 73,673 settled to live Australia and the last Census in 2001, recorded an increase of 12% totaling of 103,990 Philippines-born persons in Australia.

The review of literature by the researchers yields some important information about Australia as the research environment. It is very evident that Australia may be called as the present Land of Promise as its natural resources and human resource demands for labor allow a generous accommodation of migrants from other parts of the globe, including from the Philippines. By its very nature, Australia promises to accommodate Filipino skilled labor more than white-collar jobs. In other words, the country can be the land of promise for those who do not shun away from blue collar jobs. There are not many studies yet about employment economics especially in Australian setting. The one closest to the present work was done by Dejodo (2001) on quality of life after migration to Australia using Comprehensive Quality of Life Scale developed by Cummins. (2001) Using multivariate analysis of variance, the study succeeded to identify that contracts that are common between two nationals.

From the observation of the personal visit to Australia, the researcher was prompted to determine the status of employment of Filipino

migrants working in Australia who are professionals and skilled in their fields as public servants, computer analysts and programmers, solicitors, doctors, architects, engineers and academicians. As 103,990 Philippines-born persons in Australia marked significant contribution to Australian society, it is for this reason, that this study is proposed.

## **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The study attempts to describe the socio-economic and employment status of Filipino migrants in Australia and its implications to Philippine college education.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The study used the qualitative descriptive method of research. In this context, the researcher focused his attention to the development and validation of a survey questionnaire, interview schedule and observation guide in order to capture the realities taking place on the life of the research participants during the research process. The only territory that is not represented in the study by Hobart on Ethnicity in Tasmania (Owen C.@ H. Bound ;2006) which is at the tip of Australia and therefore is not attractive to settle in as far as Filipino migrants are concerned.

The study involved 114 Filipino migrants in Australia who were residing in capitals of the seven territories of the country. These territories are Darwin in Northern Territory, Perth in Western Australia, Adelaide in South Australia, Brisbane in Queensland, Sidney in New South Wales, Melbourne in Victoria, and Canberra which is the Australian Capital Territory. (Price .1991). Considering the fact that the researcher had no idea of the number of Filipino migrants in Australia, he decided to use the purposive sampling method through convenience sampling method. Thus, at the outset, a sample of 100 Filipino migrants was set a sample for the purpose of sourcing information and data to use in the study.

However, through convenience sampling, the target sample of 100 was increased to 114 Filipinos who were picked up during the 2008 Filipino Global Sports Festival. Except for Filipino migrants at

Tasmania, the rest of them were represented during the sports fest.

The instrument was developed based on the feedback gathered from the researcher's brother who is a Filipino migrant himself at Sidney, capital of New South Wales territory. It was from him that he gathered the construct to use in developing the questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent to the researcher's brother for validation. The process involved five Australian Filipino migrants who happened to be in Manila for vacation. Their responses proved that the instrument was easy and clear enough to generate the desired information.

With the questionnaire already validated, the researcher reproduced 120 copies and brought them with him during his trip to Sidney. Incidentally, the Filipino Global Sports Festival was about to start that season. It was also the researcher who distributed the validated questionnaire to the target respondents. The researcher-made questionnaire is easy to accomplish as the items are simply checklist in organization.

After gathering the 114 questionnaires, the researcher invited 15 Filipino migrants for a focused interview. The invitation was accepted, and the focused group interview went on very smoothly. Results of the session were recorded. The responses of the research participants were treated with the use of the descriptive statistics.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Status of Filipinos in Australia

Status of Stay in Australia	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
With working visa	5	4.38	3
Permanent resident	15	13.16	2
Australian citizen	94	82.46	1
Total	114	100	

Of the 114 Filipino migrants, more than 80 percent of them had opted to become Australian citizens. This was learned from 94 or 82.46 percent who claimed that they have already changed their citizenship, while a smaller group of 15 or 13.16 percent were permanent residents

and therefore need not apply for renewal of their visa. It is possible that they preferred to stay in that country for a very long period of time or forever as future Australian citizens. On the other hand, very few or five (5) or 4.38 percent of the 114 Filipino migrants held working visas in order to make their stay in Australia legal. Thus, they had to renew their visas before the expiration date to avoid problems with the immigration office of the Australian government. This is one obligation that a foreigner has to be diligent about to avoid any problem with the immigration in the future like deportation. There is always the question on what kind of life they had in the Philippines prior to their settlement in Australia. The issue at this point is whether or not their leaving their native land is worth the sacrifice in terms of nationalism and abandonment of allegiance to the Philippine flag. Life was hard in the Philippines prior to their migration to Australia. As ordinary wage earners, they must have experienced the difficulty of making both ends meet. Such economic state of life that time must have driven them to migrate to that country. (Bagley, C., S.Madrid, and F.Bolitho ;1997)

As social beings, the Filipino migrants must have experienced the need to socialize. This may need affiliation with organizations which, by all indications, is common among Filipinos despite life's economic difficulty. It is important therefore to find out if the subject Filipino migrants had been involved in social organizations in the Philippines prior to their migration. Table 12.

Some 63 or 57.60 percent of the 109 respondents were members of social organization in the Philippines prior to their settlement in Australia. Many of them were involved with religious activities sponsored by religious organizations while few others were involved in community work. It seems that by nature, the Filipinos are socially involved in organizations that are socio-civic and religious in nature. Only 46 or 42.50 percent of them admitted that they were not members of any social organizations prior to their settlement in Australia. The said percentage is not a safe index of being unsocial if not altogether anti-social. It is possible that they kept some kind of distance from getting involved in social organizations as it was not their cup of tea so to speak to socialize with others.

Table 2. Nature of present job in Australia

Nature of Present Job	Frequency	Percentage	Ranking
Skilled (carpentry, pipe-fitter, instrumentation, etc.)	25	25.77	1
Semiskilled (information technology, computer, technologist, etc.)	15	15.46	4
Janitorial/messangerial	4	4.12	7
Clerical	21	21.65	2
Supervisory	16	16.50	3
Managerial	10	10.31	5
Junior executive (ex: assistant vice president)	1	1.03	8
Senior executive (ex: vice president, executive vice president, president)	5	5.16	6
Total	97	100	

Some 15 or 15.46 percent others worked in semi-skilled labors as information technologists, computer technologists, and other types of blue collar jobs. Others were employed in janitorial or messenger types of jobs. Few others were employed in white collar jobs that are supervisory and managerial in nature, or as junior executive like assistant vice presidency and senior executives like vice presidency. Of such types, those that occupy middle management types of job like supervisory and managerial (26 or 26.81%) constituted the largest, followed by clerical work (21 or 21.54%), and few others in the executive level (5 or 5.16%). This goes to prove that the Filipino migrants in Australia could fit into types of works from white collar type to blue collar types of jobs. This seems to hold true among typical Filipino migrants in every part of the world.

It appears from the experiences of the 114 respondents that jobs in this land of promise are many provided the job searchers are not too choosy about the kind of jobs available. College education from the Philippines does not seem to count much in evaluation of credentials

against Australian job requirements. By evaluation, it appears that college education for a bachelor's degree in the Philippines is two years lower by Australian educational standard. It appears that educational attainment from the Philippines is not much of value as it is perhaps in other parts of the world.

However, every Filipino college graduate may land a job in Australia as long as they do not choose the kind of work available. It seems that an applicant has to prove yet his potentialities to be able to get better paying jobs in Australia. As discovered by Filipino migrants, a Filipino job seeker can always try any kind of jobs, setting aside his educational attainment, as long as he is willing to accept any job that are not along his academic orientation.

### 3. Problems and Difficulties in Landing a Job in Australia

Interviews with Filipino migrants in the six territories of Australia tended to reveal that landing a job in the said country is not much of a problem as long as Filipino professionals do not match their college education with the job that them. In the first place, before Filipino or any foreign applicant for a job in Australia is granted a working visa in that country, the Australian embassy in the Philippines will have to evaluate first the capabilities of the Filipino aspirant for migration to that country and match their qualification with Australian standards.

As a policy, the Australian embassy would not grant any visa to foreigner unless it is sure that jobs are available for the applicants. It follows therefore that the Australian Embassy has to ascertain first that jobs are available for foreign applicants before their applications for migration are given due course or evaluated, and that the as foreign nationals, they are willing to start on blue collar jobs available based on qualification. In other words, no foreign nationals who apply for jobs in Australia would be allowed to enter the Australian territories as migrant workers unless the embassy is certain that jobs are available for them. Jobs in Australia are numerous. This seems to explain why the Australian government hardly has any problem with over-staying foreigners.

A foreign national may be allowed to go to Australia as tourist. He or she may look for a job could not work in any capacity. He/she has

to go back home to apply for a working visa as the government would not allow any foreign national to stay beyond the allowed number of days as tourist or face deportation immediately if found over-staying. (Burnley I., S. Encel @ G.McCall,1995). In Australia, unlike in the U.S. and even in other parts of the globe, a tourist can extend his visit by hiding or sort of playing hide and seek with immigration authorities. Not in Australia where the immigration policemen are so efficient in tracing overstaying visitors. In other words, the colloquial T.N.T. (*tago nang tago*) does not hold water at all in any of the seven territories in Australia.

Back to the issue on problems or difficulties in landing a job in that land of promise, the issue does not hold water because jobs are available and that no foreigner in search for a job is allowed to set foot in any of the territories of the continent unless there is a job waiting for him. The more important thing is that the job seeker is willing to start with skilled or semi-skilled labor which may appear to be very low when matched with his educational attainment. For college degrees outside Australia are not considered as long as such college education would match with the country's standard. To be able to get better jobs above the blue collar level, the aspirant, while working as skilled labor, may be allowed to study to meet the educational requirements set by the country's Ministry of Education. But such arrangement is still subject to approval of the Australian employers.

However, college graduates from the Philippines are considered for higher types of jobs if the Filipino applicants are graduates of the University of the Philippines, the Ateneo de Manila University, the De la Salle University, the University of Santo Tomas, and the Silliman University. This consideration may sound offensive to other university administrators, but it appears that the Australian system of college education gives a higher premium to graduates of those universities at the sacrifice of prestige of majority of higher education institutions in the Philippines. Sad to say, that is Australia's way of showing diplomatic grace to Philippine government. Secondly, that is Australia's way of giving recognition to Filipino college graduates from the universities just mentioned.

To reiterate, Filipino migrants in Australia did not encounter any difficulty in landing jobs because most of them started with skilled



and semi-skilled labor despite their high educational attainment. They did not encounter any problem in landing a job because the Australian Embassy in the Philippines assured them of job placement before they were allowed to settle in that land of promise.

Table 4. Summary table of weighted means reflecting the Filipino state of life in Australia

Filipino State of Life in Australia	Mean	Verbal Interpretation	Rank
Economic Life	3.53	Better than before	1
Socio-cultural Life	3.21	Good enough	3
Political Life	2.96	Good enough	4
Professional Life	3.27	Good enough	2
Over-all Mean	3.24	Good enough	

In more specific terms, their economic state of living in Australia is very much better compared with what they had in the Philippines. This was sustained by the obtained mean value of 3.52 which is first in the rank order distribution of the means. In other words, the verbal interpretation of the obtained mean tended to manifest the realization of the aspiration of Filipino migrants to experience a good life in terms of economic security and stability.

In support of the foregoing interpretation of the mean of economic state of life is the apparent employment of the subject Filipino migrants in the exercise of their professions. It was revealed, as evidenced by the obtained mean of 3.27 that their state of professional life was good enough to make them enjoy their jobs. This state of affairs in the exercise of their profession yielded a better quality of life. Otherwise, if one does not enjoy discharging his profession, he is likely to feel discontented about his economic life.

The subject Filipino migrants seem to enjoy the socio-cultural and political life they have had in Australia which they found good enough compared with what they had in the Philippines. This was inferred from their responses that obtained mean values of 3.21 and 2.96 for the state of socio-cultural and political life, respectively.

The over-all mean of 3.24 tended to sustain the observation that the subject Filipino migrants are enjoying a good life in Australia. This generalization tended to compensate the sacrifices they experienced in leaving their loved ones in the Philippines in their search for a better quality of life which they could not find in their native land. As migrants, they found their settlement in Australia rewarding to a full extent as may be perceived from their responses that obtained a mean of 3.01. The magnitude of the mean falls in the second rung of options. As such, they seemed to be already contented with the kind of life they have had in that country.

### **Implications to Philippine College Education**

In much the same way, graduates of universities outside Australia have also the competitive edge over graduates from ordinary higher educational institutions. The Australian employment sector seems to have strong preferences to graduates of prestigious Philippine universities like the U.P., U.S.T., Ateneo de Manila University, De la Salle University, and Silliman University among others. The employment market could be very discriminating about the prestige of the institution where an applicant graduated from regardless of country of origin.

It can be reiterated that jobs are abundant in Australia for Filipino college graduates, but as already mentioned, they have to settle first for blue collar jobs before they can go up the ladder toward white collar types of job. What appears as important criteria are the prestige of the diploma-granting institution where the applicants graduated from, written and oral Australian English language competence, skills in computer application, and most importantly, the humility to accept skilled or semi-skilled labor despite their college diploma.

It is in order to stress those administrators of higher education institutions in the Philippines have to intensify the instruction, research, computer application and English language competence aspects of university management for their graduates to gain respectable impression and the competitive edge they need. This also true to research results of Del Mundo(2008), that the very important job requirements among applicants include human relation skills, interpersonal and communication skills.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study is an attempt at identifying job opportunities in Australia for college graduates. The data analysis yields important discovery about Filipino migrants in Australia, and point out that various types of jobs are available not only for college graduates but also to anyone who is willing to start from the bottom. The experiences of most Filipino migrants in Australia about the chances of Filipino college graduates are high but there are certain things they should take into account before venturing into job hunting in this land of promise.

Skilled and semi-skilled labors are abundant in Australia. These are kind of jobs that Filipino college graduates would not usually settle on in his country as they are oriented to the convention of white collar job for college graduates. For instance, how will a certified public accountant settle for a semi-skilled labor when his academic orientation is along accounting, tax, auditing, financial management. In the Philippines, seldom would a C.P.A. accept the job of a payroll clerk or time-keeper as such position is beneath the dignity of a C.P.A. in the context of Philippine employment expectancies.

Similarly, an M.B.A. graduate from a prestigious university in the Philippines may decline a semi-skilled job in an Australian company in any of its territories. The rejection is not due to racial discrimination; it is due to the evaluation of his academic credential which, as already mentioned, is short of two years of basic education. Thus, the alternative left to the prospective aspirant for work is to accept semi-skilled jobs along his academic preparation – a CPA as accounting clerk or bookkeeper of that sort.

The foregoing explanation applies to engineers who may have the license from the Professional Regulation Commission (PRC) of the Philippines, which by Australian standard, does not merit anything above blue collar employment. However, the work status of Filipino migrant workers can change if he takes time to study two more years in Australian schools to offset the deficit in educational attainment. In this regard, the Filipino worker concerned can make arrangement with the company administrators to study while at the same time work, provided his studies do not run in conflict with his job. After completing the required educational attainment, he may be promoted

to collar job position or apply for a much higher position in another company.

Another important index of employment in Australia is computer literacy. In other words, an accountant's knowledge of computer application or auto-cad for an engineer will be an advantage to land in a semi-skilled job. After few years or even few months of semi-skilled work, he may get promoted to the level of professional accountant or engineer having convinced his employer that he has the expertise for higher plain type of jobs.

Knowledge of written and oral English communication will also be an advantage for Filipinos college graduates who desire to look for jobs in Australia. English language competence is a must especially for college graduates who are searching for jobs. It is not an ultimate guaranty but just an advantage and therefore competitive edge over other aspirants with limited command of the English. The ability of self-expression in written and oral English will definitely help an applicant looking for work in Australia especially if he has acquired the Australian diction and intonation. In this regard, he has to enroll in an Australian language center to acquire the preferred linguistic competence in Australian English.

By Australian standard, college education in the Philippines is short of two years of basic education. Thus, it is not the academic degree that matters but the standard that the Australian ministry of education set in evaluating an applicant for a job that counts most. By accreditation of academic degree acquired, Filipino college graduates may have to settle for jobs that are skilled or semi-skilled in nature because his college degree is short of two years when evaluated against the Australian standard.

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