

Doing Things Right: The Lived Experience of Overseas Filipino Workers Having Brain Drain

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Abstract— Brain drain is a common concern that continues to emerge over the years, particularly in countries with a high emigration rate, such as the Philippines. As this study attempts to capture the lived experiences of the OFWs who experienced brain drain, it also underscores the importance of understanding the life of the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW's). This research study follows a phenomenological research design, which digs deep in the lived experiences of the OFW's as relayed through the articulations and musings of the respondents. The data were gathered through a semi-structured interview following the emic-to etic transcription saturated through cool and warm analysis in order to discover the emerging themes. Member checking procedure was utilized to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. Outcomes have emerged three demands of OFWs, namely, self-demand, family demand, and industry demand. Such resulting demands of job mismatch manifest that brain drain is an inevitable occurrence for OFWs, wherein they are left with no choice but to accept the jobs that are easily acquired or available in the industry for the sake of having stable financial support for themselves and for their families.

Index Terms— brain drain, job mismatch, self-demand, family demand, industry demand.

I. INTRODUCTION

Brain drain is a common concern that continues to emerge over the years, particularly in countries with a high emigration rate, such as the Philippines. More than ten million of its population work overseas, going to countries such as the US, Singapore, and the Middle East (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2017 as cited by Alegado, 2018). This means that a drain or depletion of skills and knowledge occurred from the developing countries to the developed countries at a minimal cost. However, in the later period, it took a twist with the idea that a brain drain can be beneficial for the sending countries. Modern theories of endogenous growth have considerably renewed the analysis of the relations between education and job growth as a significant determinant of long-term growth (Lucas, 1988 as cited by M. Biene et al., 2001).

Inevitably, it is a common occurrence for people to migrate overseas, prompted by many different circumstances, be it personal or not, to access better benefits and quality in life, often disregarding the alignment of their jobs and the degree

at hand. Thus, there is a transfer of human resources. (World Bank, 2000; Dodani&LaPorte, 2005; Graham, 2013; Battistella& Liao, 2013; Union Congress of the Philippines, 2016;). Due to the discrepancy between the job applied and skills at hand, there are consequences faced for those experiencing a brain drain. Losses and various conflicts will occur if adjusting to the job mismatch does not go well, and the person involved may be affected negatively. In this paper, the researchers aim to understand why brain drain occurs as the results will serve as bases for labor-related agencies and universities to reflect on and to take the necessary actions to assess, reengineer the tertiary curricula, and review course offerings to align the market and industry demands both the national and the international labor force.

Furthermore, job mismatch, as discussed in the HRSDC Draft Statement of Work, is defined as a worker in a job that does not correspond to his/ her level of education, experience, skills, or interests. It can have adverse effects on economic and social outcomes as it can lead to skill loss, lower job satisfaction, productivity loss, weakened income security, and problems with labor force attachment. However, some researchers argued that a little brain drain (an optimal amount) could go some way in boosting the economic development of sending countries (N. Gungör& A. Tansel, 2014). If it does go well, there is an acquisition of skills, and the goals pursued may be achieved (Purgill, 2010; Graham, 2013; Karpilo et al. 2019). It somehow offers favorable effect when one has learned to accept the job and become productive the extent to which is that the mobility of skilled workers has increased, fueled by job expectations from a better-educated population in countries of origin and fanned by globalization, advances in communication and technology and the international integration of market systems (World Bank, 2000).

Realistically, it is unusual to have a skilled professional moving to a foreign country for self-improvement alone. In most cases, a lot of them choose to migrate in order to find a job that will provide them a source of income due to the availability of better job opportunities overseas. Hence a population of 10% from the Philippines is working for higher-paying, less-skilled jobs (Morella and Haydes, 2005). Consequently, acquiring a job that is not associated with their educational attainment is significantly evident among OFWs since there is a growing mismatch between the job seekers' finished course and available occupations in their destination country (McDonald & Valenzuela, 2009). Amass of researches at hand related to the labor market and job satisfaction, but little is known on the study about brain drain. It is on this purpose that the essence of the Lebenswelt experiences of OFW's that surfaced in this study can shed

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light in understanding that their bitter-sweet experiences can never be underestimated for they have sacrificed a lot all for the sake of alleviating the lives of their family and could at least get rid of poverty. While the perspective of the few that brain drain significantly affects work productivity, the lived experiences of the OFW's on this aspect have shown that experiencing brain drain can be both favorable and unfavorable.

II. METHOD

Research Design

This study is qualitative in orientation and categorically, a phenomenological research design (Ren, 2015). The central aspect of this approach is to understand the essence of the experience that participants share within a common ground (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). As emphasized by Lester (1999), this is highly substantial in understanding subjective experiences and gaining insights about people's motivations and decisions. Here, the researchers aim to describe as accurately as possible the phenomenon, refraining from any pre-given framework, but remaining true to the facts (Groenewald, 2004).

Research Locus and Sample

The locale of this study is in the state of Qatar, where most OFW's have found a job not related to the course they have obtained. Qatar is considered as a rich country in the world in terms of GDP. Infrastructures and road constructions are in place in preparation for the FIFA tournament in 2023.

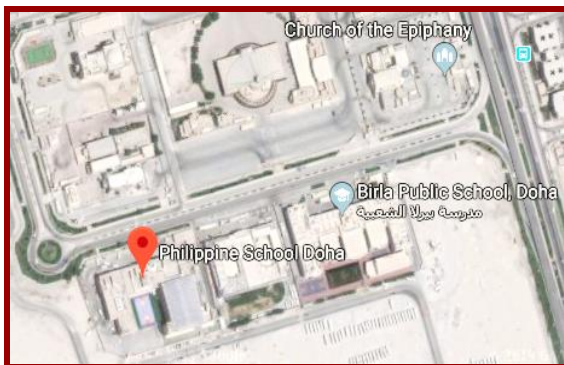


Figure 1 Map of Qatar, taken from the lonelyplanet.com

The chosen participants of this study were Overseas Filipino Workers, specifically OFWs having a job mismatch, who are Qatar residents. The selection of the seven participants was made through a qualitative purposive sampling strategy (Creswell and Plano, 2011; Bernard, 2002; Patton, 2002). This is characterized by the incorporation of specific criteria met by the participants at the moment of selection (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). They were chosen considering their occupation and years of stay in Qatar as the researchers believe their insights are constructive because they have witnessed the progress of Qatar as time evolves.



Figure 2 Location of Philippine School Doha at Al Messiah, Doha, Qatar taken from Google Maps

Data Collection and Ethical Consideration

Data needed in this study were gathered through a semi-structured interview with the help of instruments such as the *robotfoto* and the twenty-five semi-structured interview guide. The *robotfoto* (Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002; Garcia & Acosta, 2016) sought the demographic sketch of the participants, namely educational attainment, work experience, and years of stay in the State of Qatar. The twenty-five item semi-structured interview guide was also used in following up on specific ideas or issues to explore specific experiences ensuring that the sensitivity of subject being researched will float in participants' consciousness (Fossey, 2001 as cited by Garcia & Acosta, 2017).

Data gathered were transcribed verbatim with the help of the recording gadget, and the participants were assured that their responses would be treated with the utmost confidentiality (Kayed & Hassan, 2013).

Prior to the data collection proper, pilot interview was enacted. This is an integral aspect and useful in the process of conducting phenomenological qualitative research as it highlights the preparation for the significant study (Majid et al., 2017). Subsequently, the researchers sought approval from the participants through written consent.

Data Analysis

The researchers have followed the inductive approach in theme development (Ryan and Bernard, 2003) to comprehensively analyze the gathered data in this study: (1) reading and rereading of the transcribed data to obtain the general sense of the participants' idea or opinion; (2) identifying small units called the meaning units; (3) transforming meaning units from the language of the participants (emic) to the language of the researchers (etic); (4) sorting formulated meanings into categories and cluster of themes via a *dendrogram* (Faulkner and Sparkes as cited by Acosta, 2010); (5) creating a simulacrum for the visual representation of the findings; (6) subjecting emergent themes to triangulation and member checking procedures to ensure validity and data trustworthiness (McWilliam et al., 2009).

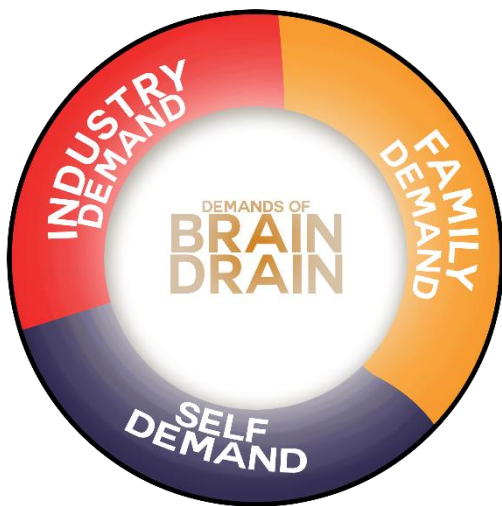


Figure 3 Causes of Brain-Drain

The figure above shows the demands of Brain-Drain of the Filipino Overseas Workers namely; industry demand, family demand, and self-demand that represent the struggles of OFWs in finding the right job related to the degree they have learned.

III. FINDINGS

Elucidating the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers who are experiencing a brain drain, this phenomenological research attempts to divulge the demands that contribute in seeking to answer the question; **Why does brain drain happen to Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW)?** Articulations, reflections, and statements of the respondents render three demands that led to the Brain-Drain of OFWs in Qatar. Self-demand elaborates that one is left with no choice on the availability of jobs; Industry demand talks about the trends and availability of jobs in the industry, and Family demand discusses the importance of providing for the family needs regardless of the kind of job being offered to.

Self Demand

When one is left with no choice, he or she has to grab every opportunity; otherwise, he or she will lose the chance. This means that going abroad offers many uncertainties that put one to take the risk of facing the realities in life once he or she gets to the place unknown to him or her to find a better job. However, struggles of finding the right job for the course that one graduated from has become a bitter-sweet experience of which one respondent shared:

“I decided to accept this job because it is the only chance and opportunity I was given to be part of this institution. I hoped to be part of the first aid unit; however, there is no vacancy, so I decided to accept another job even though it is far from my profession because I believe that I can still touch the lives of the children.” (R2)

This statement shows that the respondent has no choice but to accept the job even if it is not related to the course he or she graduated from. Another respondent also supports this:

“I wanted to have a job at that time, so I grabbed the opportunity even though I don’t have any idea about the job. I applied for a school nurse, and yet they told me, “there is no position vacant for a school nurse,” so they hired me as an after-care attendant instead.” (R1)

This shows that self-demand comes from the inner desire of an individual who is willing to sacrifice and immerse to a job available instead of waiting for the right job for him or her; otherwise, he or she will be sent home

Family Demand

Close family ties are one of the distinct characteristics that every Filipino family has. Evidently, Filipinos put high regard on their families that they are willing to sacrifice going abroad just to provide the needs, wants, and demands of the family as shared by this respondent, *“I didn’t want to leave the Philippines because I have my own business there; yet was not enough for my family. I had to choose between family and career, so I decided to go to Qatar to support my children’s studies and to augment our finances as well.” (R4)*

The statement is supported by two other responses that explain the struggle of how Filipinos need to sacrifice being together with their family in the Philippines in order to provide for and help them.

“I was shocked by the different situations of the OFWs here, especially when you have children, and nobody would take care of them. My children were young at that time, and for four years, I was jobless while taking care of my children. However, when we transferred here in Doha, they were already big enough, and my eldest child was in the 5th grade. Nevertheless, my husband still did not allow me to work in the hospital due to conflicting schedules that no one would attend to the need of our children. I told him, “I need to work!” so I looked for a job that I can be with my children, we have the same schedule. I submitted my application as a school nurse, yet there was no vacancy except after-care attendant, so I took the job.” (R1)

The respondent was willingly accepting to go through hardships in order to support and provide her family needs. This shows how OFWs are willing to take on jobs no matter how odd they are all for the sake of the family.

Industry Demand

There are times that opportunities come knocking. On the one hand, one must strive to reach for it, and on the other hand, it will be right there unexpectedly. There are various circumstances that one is unable to take the jobs desired because of the unavailability of the job that matches the individual skills. The two respondents have confirmed this:

“I am a graduate of Physical Therapy, and my first job in my present company was secretary admin assistant. After 2

years, the management recognized my skills and efficiency, and they transferred me to assist the main department company, which is the sales department.” (R5)

“Okay, number one, we had a condition. They would not give me NOC if I had the same services or the same specialization. So that is why I had to change my course. Perse, I worked because I could not be given an NOC at that time. Secondly, I tried as a secretary position here in PSD, as my first job, until I found an engineering job.” (R7)

These responses show that one can take a different line of job even if it is not related to his/her degree. However, a requirement in the industry compels him or her to respond to industry demand even if it requires other training and acquisition of skills to be developed.

Furthermore, this implies that circumstances can be understood enough to choose another job on one’s own volition, but there is another circumstance akin to the statements above, such as complying with labor demand and market in the industry. This means that some OFWs are aware of their skills and competencies, that they voluntarily utilize them to respond to the demand of the industry, as mused by one respondent:

“I am a Physical Therapy graduate, and because of the industry demand, all companies need to have a marketing and advertising team to promote and market the products. I figured that all companies would not be able to start without advertising, so I decided to put up a printing business here in Qatar.” (R4)

These musings and articulations of the respondents’ responses show that industry demand can change the job priorities of individuals to fit in need to the world of work regardless of whether or not it is related to the degree they have learned.

IV. DISCUSSION

Attaining a job that one does not desire to have can be brought upon by instances that are least expected. As this research article progresses, employing phenomenology as its research design and in order to capture the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers in Qatar, it unveils the demands of brain drain. It is considered as their struggles in finding the right job for them. From The musings and articulations of the respondents, they revealed that these struggles are known to be job demands that one has to immerse without minding on whether or not it is related to the degree he or she earned. Self-demand emphasizes how OFWs is left with no choice, family demand elaborates on the importance of family support, and the industry demand widens the opportunity for individuals to choose what is available in the industry.

Self –Demand

Self-demand as a factor occurs to Overseas Filipino workers when there is no other choice but to accept the available job offer despite being unrelated to their degree. As claimed by the Antiquenas University graduates of 2014-2016, 48%

states that there are no available jobs in general, or no available jobs in their profession making it challenging to enter the labor market with the jobs that are aligned with their field of expertise (World Bank, 2016; Albert, Dumagan& Martinez, 2015). In the context of this study, self-demand evokes selflessness and acceptance of the job available just for getting the job without minding of its nature. Natividad (2012) reiterates that in the Philippines alone, the lack of available jobs and declining work demand in the market, college graduates are only granted to work with minor roles less than the graduates’ capabilities, wasting the skills that they have honed in their years of study. These situations are often taken advantage of by employers and businessmen to save labor costs and earn more profit for their businesses that are critical for companies aiming to raise performance and to be competitive (Velciu, 2017, Natividad, 2012). Experiences of OFW’s would tell that since being new in the foreign land, without passing through labor agencies, they were left helpless. It is difficult to find a job fitted for them since their VISA is not fit for employment and if their VISA’s were soon to expire, they were left with no choice but to grab every piece of job placement no matter how mismatched it would seem for as long as they would not be sent back home to Phils. Furthermore, with such high competition for career opportunities, some applicants were left with no choice and were desperate to have a job despite the fact that it offers a lower wage that does not fit with their expectations as long as there is a security of tenure (Natividad, 2012 Dumagan& Martinez, 2015).

Self-sacrifices are needed to be done in order to compromise for the situations they are experiencing. These cases may not apply to all but may relatively boil down to unfavorable circumstances that create an impact for them to diverge from the specialized field they sought out to pursue from the start resulting in brain drain. This phenomenon mainly benefits industries in such a way that it decreases their labor cost but, in turn, also has a negative impact in the market demand market due to the workload dispersion being inadequately distributed amongst the employees.

Family Demand

Filipinos are known to have a secure connection and respect towards their families in which they are willing to prioritize familial interests over individual goals. A migrant worker rarely leaves for the reason of individual improvement alone. Generally, they sacrifice the time they would have spent with their families in the Philippines in order to support family demands such as education for their children, housing, and financial needs (Tope, 2016). The idea of providing family support is not a bad idea for it helps to fulfill financial needs. However, Okumura, (1996) claims that it is a national tragedy that they should have to depart in such high numbers and at such great distances from families to perform jobs that others despise. With this in mind, OFWs go through great lengths and sacrifices so that they could provide each of their families’ needs.

As it is, a lot of Filipinos go abroad in order to seek economic opportunities and to support their families through

remittances (Hall et al., 2019). However, with this, some families of OFWs who are left behind in the Philippines appear to be too dependent on these remittances to the point that getting a job to help out with monetary provision wouldn't occur in their mind. Previous study conducted by the International Monetary Fund in 2011, showed that several families left by an OFW do not take initiatives to work and help even though they have the capacity and qualification to work but instead rely heavily on remittances and spent to the extent that they share portion of the money with their extended families and relatives at their caprices. In this context, the family demand for OFWs compels them to find a job in order to provide the needs and demands of their family, making it a source of stress. Concerning this, some of their families in the Philippines were tolerated to solely depend on them and become extravagant in spending at the expense of their loved ones who have worked with the hard-earned money (Jagalagat Jr. and Dalluay, 2016). This argues with the claim that not all families of OFWs are like this. Culturally, Filipinos are relational people, and they value their families regardless of the mistakes they have committed. Their families also show great compassion towards the hardships that they are experiencing (Jones & Obenque, 2016).

Relatively, family demands are not only coming from the demand itself but the volition of the OFW to shoulder the needs of their families. Despite the stress, hardships, and limited job opportunities that they experience overseas. The familial bonds of OFWs are deeply rooted.

Industry Demand

Responding to the strain of trade and the correct skills required, there are emerging unit circumstances that will interfere with the jobs. The gaps between supply and demand at the country level and specific sectors, or at an individual level, is the idea for job-mismatch is centered on. This relates to Industry demand wherein applying for jobs required by certain industries. Folks would go abroad for economic opportunities offered and also the quantity of pay offered (Card, 1987; Benjamin, 1992; Ratha et al., 2016). However, between skilled workers and employers' demand, it happens in sensible terms in regions and localities; and at a regional level, employment opportunities for job seekers have mainly dictated to the finite spatial flexibility of the industry workforce (World Bank, 2012; Koettl et al., 2015; Kupets, 2016).

Similarly, in labor economics, industries do create jobs, while job seekers need to respond to the needs in the workforce. As argument poses by the Golden Rule of Human Resources, "Right Person for the proper Job", hence, the event of the trade-related to the duty matching skills of the job (Afridi & Baloch, 2015). In this case, OFW's are forced to face labor market policies that are crucially influenced by it, pointing to structural modifications of skill-biased technological or structure change (Hamermesh & Biddle, 1993; Lichter et al., 2015) where they need to learn new skills to adapt to what is new in the industry.

On a positive note, to be part of industry demand, significance of experiential learning or work expertise market improves the staff for the work (Randall et al., 1991; Casner-Lotto and

Barrington, 2006; Gault et al., 2000; Gault et al., 2010) where brain-drain is evident yet new skills are acquired and developed.

V. CONCLUSION

Interested in finding the demands of brain –drain, this study seeks to serve as a springboard in understanding the underlying circumstances for OFWs to accept jobs that lead to job mismatch. Extrapolated from the responses, the causes were deduced as three main demands contributing to brain-drain. The first demand is self-demand, occurring when the OFW has no choice but to accept the only available job which is not in line with the degree he/she attained, otherwise he or she would be sent back to the Philippines having no jobs at all. The second demand is family demand, being prompted to accept the job regardless of its nature with the goal of supporting his/her family. The third demand is Industry demand, meeting the supply and demand of labor in different industries, thus being compelled to apply for the job. These factors, however, share a common goal: needing to support, be it themselves or for their family.

In like manner, going through a brain-drain can be beneficial or detrimental. Beneficial as new skills can be acquired from the job at hand and detrimental as the prerequisite knowledge and skills for the job would extend to no purpose. The fact that OFW's are left with no other alternative but to accept the job even though it is unrelated to their degree is a sad reality that they need to accept; otherwise, they will go back to the Philippines disappointed and frustrated. Different demands, as revealed in the study, signify the sense of urgency of OFW's to go abroad, and it navigates only for one purpose; to help the family.

This study proclaims that brain drain as an inevitable occurrence for OFWs. This calls all universities to take action on reviewing and assessing their course offerings to align the demands in the industry. In so doing, our graduates can easily fit in and respond to the market needs in the workforce. The results of this study recommend that in this sad reality, it enables OFW's to adapt and have the proper mindset of accepting changes in their working environment. They should learn to bloom wherever they may be planted. OFWs must not settle for what skills they currently acquire; hence, before going overseas or taking up a new job, they must acquire the proper background skills or the fundamentals of the new job they plan to venture on.

Undoubtedly, brain drain also affects OFWs emotionally and psychologically, where their outlook on the situation would affect how they would feel. On the one hand, some OFWs will feel disheartened as they accept the fact that they are to work in a field that is not matched, and on the other hand, some will see this as an opportunity and feel positive despite not having their desired job. It could also be implied that finishing a job or getting a course, whether lucrative or not, is not a guarantee that one can find a job that is aligned to what he or she has finished. When OFWs experience brain drain, they would undoubtedly benefit more financially than having a job in the Philippines because of higher-paying jobs abroad. They can earn a higher salary working overseas and, at the same time, raises the amount of money a family of an overseas worker has.

Finally, while this study captures the lived experiences of OFW's who experienced brain-drain, it is of no guarantee that other concerns related to this have been explored. It is for this reason that other metrical research methodologies and designs can also be utilized, may it be in the quantitative mood or other qualitative measures.

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