

Motivational Drives Behind Indonesian Female Nursing Graduates' Pursuit of Rn-Clex in California: A Hermeneuticphenomenological Study

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Abstract

The increasing demand for globally competent nurses has prompted many Indonesian nurses to pursue international licensure, such as the NCLEX-RN in the United States. Understanding the motivations behind this pursuit is essential for informing nursing education, workforce planning, and international migration policies. This hermeneutic phenomenological study explored the lived experiences and motivational drives of Indonesian female nursing graduates pursuing the Registered Nurse (RN) licensure by passing the NCLEX-RN examination in California. Utilizing in-depth interviews with ten Indonesian female nurses who have successfully obtained their RN licenses and are practicing in California, the research aimed to uncover the complex interplay of personal, professional, economic, and socio-cultural factors shaping their decisions and experiences. The study revealed five overarching themes "Economic aspirations and the pursuit of financial stability," "Professional growth and the desire for advanced opportunities," Familial responsibilities and the drive to support loved ones," "The allure of western healthcare systems and improved working conditions," and "Navigating cultural adjustments and maintaining identity in a new environment." The findings provide valuable insights into the motivations, challenges, and resilience of Indonesian female nurses seeking international opportunities, ultimately contributing to a deeper understanding of the global nursing migration phenomenon. The implications of the study address the need for culturally sensitive support systems and policies to facilitate successful integration and retention of international nurses in healthcare settings. Further research is needed to explore the experiences of Indonesian female nurses who were unsuccessful in obtaining U.S. RN licensure.

Keywords: Female nursing graduates, hermeneutic phenomenological study, Indonesian, motivational drives, RN-CLEX California.

Introduction

The global nursing shortage, intensified by factors such as aging populations, increased healthcare demands, and insufficient training capacity, has fueled the international migration of nurses from developing countries to developed nations (WHO, 2020). Among these migrant nurses, Indonesian female nursing graduates represent a significant and growing population seeking professional opportunities abroad, particularly in the United States (US), specifically California. California's robust healthcare infrastructure, attractive compensation packages, and reputation for advanced nursing practice continue to draw international nurses seeking career advancement and improved quality of life (California Board of Registered Nursing, 2023).

Several studies shown that the global nursing shortage is a well-documented phenomenon, with projections indicating a significant shortfall in the coming years (WHO, 2020). This shortage has prompted developed countries to actively recruit nurses from developing nations, creating a global market for nursing talent (Nydahl et al., 2024). International nurse migration is driven by a complex interplay of "push" and "pull" factors, influencing the decisions of nurses to seek employment opportunities abroad (Benfifi, 2024). One of the pull factors including higher salaries and better benefit revealed that the US healthcare system generally offers significantly higher salaries and comprehensive benefits packages compared to many developing countries (Sweileh, 2024). This economic incentive is often a primary motivator for nurses seeking to improve their financial stability and support their families. The other is professional development opportunities which the US healthcare system is known for its advanced technology, specialized training programs, and opportunities for professional growth (Brush et al., 2019). Nurses are drawn to the prospect of expanding their skills, specializing in specific areas, and gaining experience in a leading healthcare environment. In addition, career advancement which opportunities for advancement in the US nursing field are numerous. International nurses see a clear

path of training and development, that helps them enhance their skill sets and move up the career ladder (Xu et al., 2022).

On the other hand push factors such as challenges in Indonesia that including limited economic opportunities where nursing salaries in Indonesia are often low, and economic opportunities for advancement are limited (Budiharto & Bowers, 2017). This can lead to dissatisfaction and a desire to seek better financial prospects abroad. In aspect of lack of professional development which opportunities for specialized training and professional development in Indonesia may be scarce or inaccessible to many nurses (Mozolová & Tupá, 2024). This limits their ability to enhance their skills and advance their careers. On the other hand, challenging working conditions such as nurses in Indonesia often face challenging working conditions, including heavy workloads, inadequate resources, and limited support (Hariyati et al., 2016). This can lead to burnout and a desire for a more supportive work environment. The social and cultural factors reported as Indonesian culture often places a strong emphasis on familial responsibilities and the desire to provide for loved ones (Smith and Lee, 2025). This can motivate nurses to seek higher-paying jobs abroad to support their families back home.

Studies shown that the experiences of Indonesian nurses abroad are often highlighted face numerous challenges in their new environments. Cultural adjustment such as adapting to a new culture, including language barriers, different social norms, and unfamiliar healthcare practices, can be challenging and stressful (Al-Btoush & El-Bcheraoui, 2024). Furthermore, discrimination and bias may experience discrimination or bias from colleagues, patients, or supervisors due to their ethnicity, accent, or cultural background (Antón-Solanas et al., 2022). Homesickness and isolation evidenced by being away from family and friends can lead to feelings of homesickness, isolation, and loneliness (Ho et al., 2022). In addition, navigating the Licensure Process by obtaining RN licensure in the US, particularly passing the NCLEX-RN examination, can be a complex and demanding process for international nurses (Yoo et al., 2020).

This study employs a hermeneutic phenomenological approach, drawing upon the philosophical insights of Martin Heidegger (1962) and Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1962). Hermeneutic phenomenology seeks to understand the meaning individuals ascribe to their lived experiences within a specific context. It emphasizes the interpretive nature of human understanding and the importance of exploring the subjective experiences of participants. This framework is particularly well-suited for exploring the motivational drives of Indonesian female nurses pursuing RN licensure in California, as it allows for a deep exploration of their lived experiences and the meanings they attach to their decisions (Heidegger, 1962; Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

Heidegger's concept of Dasein (being-in-the-world) highlights the interconnectedness of individuals with their environment and the importance of understanding human existence within its specific context (Heidegger, 1962). This concept is relevant to understanding how Indonesian female nurses' motivations are shaped by their personal, professional, and socio-cultural backgrounds, as well as their interactions with the healthcare environment in California. Merleau-Ponty's emphasis on the lived body and embodied experience provides a framework for understanding how nurses' physical and emotional experiences shape their perceptions and motivations (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). This is particularly relevant to understanding the challenges and adjustments faced by Indonesian female nurses as they navigate a new cultural and professional environment.

While previous research has examined the general phenomenon of international nurse migration (Benfifi, 2024; Sweileh, 2024), a dearth of literature specifically addresses the nuanced motivational drives and lived experiences of Indonesian female nursing graduates pursuing RN licensure in California. Existing studies often focus on macro-level factors such as recruitment patterns, economic disparities, and governmental policies, neglecting the personal and cultural contexts influencing individual nurses' decisions (Brush et al., 2019; Sweileh, 2024). Understanding the motivational complexities of this specific

population is crucial for developing effective recruitment and retention strategies, fostering culturally sensitive healthcare environments, and supporting the professional growth of these vital contributors to the nursing workforce.

This study, therefore, aims to explore the intricate motivational drives behind Indonesian female nursing graduates' pursuit of RN licensure by passing the NCLEX-RN examination in California, adopting a hermeneutic phenomenological approach to capture the depth and richness of their lived experiences. By uncovering the multi-faceted factors shaping their decisions, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of the international nursing migration phenomenon and offers practical implications for healthcare organizations, policymakers, and aspiring international nurses.

Research Methods

Study Design

This study utilized a hermeneutic phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences and motivational drives of Indonesian female nursing graduates pursuing RN licensure in California. This approach is particularly appropriate for understanding the subjective meanings and interpretations individuals attach to their experiences within a specific context (van Manen, 1990).

Settings

This study was conducted in a virtual setting involving Indonesian female graduate nursing students who were pursuing or had recently completed the requirements for the NCLEX-RN examination in California, USA. Data were collected between June and July 2024. Given the international nature of the participants and the geographic dispersion, data collection was facilitated through online platforms, ensuring accessibility and convenience. The virtual setting allowed participants to engage in in-depth interviews from their preferred environments, thereby promoting comfort and openness in sharing their lived experiences related to motivation

and achievement.

Research subject

The participants in this study were ten Indonesian female nurses who met the following criteria: (1) Graduated from a nursing program in Indonesia; (2) Successfully passed the NCLEX-RN examination; (3) Currently hold an active RN license in California; (4) Have been working as a registered nurse in California for at least one year; (5) Willing to participate in an in-depth interview. Participants were recruited through snowball sampling, starting with contacts known to the researcher and then expanding through referrals. This method allowed for access to a population that may be difficult to reach through traditional recruitment methods. Identify the specific purposeful sampling strategy/strategies used— theoretical, maximum variation, extreme case. For example, 'A sample of Registered Nurses was recruited using maximum variation sampling for number of years of nursing experience.'

Data collection

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with each participant. The interviews were conducted in English, and each lasted approximately 60-90 minutes. The interview guide was developed based on the literature review and the theoretical framework, and included open-ended questions designed to elicit rich descriptions of participants' experiences, motivations, and challenges (Braun and Clarke, 2021; Castillo-Montoya, 2019). Examples of interview questions include: (1) What were your primary motivations for pursuing RN licensure in California?; (2) Can you describe your experience preparing for and taking the NCLEX-RN examination?; (3) What have been the biggest challenges you have faced since moving to California? (4) How has your experience working as a nurse in California compared to your expectations?; (5) How do you maintain your cultural identity while adapting to a new environment?. All interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the hermeneutic phenomenological approach outlined by van Manen (1990). This involved a cyclical process of reading and re-reading the transcripts to identify recurring themes, patterns, and significant statements. The analysis involved the following steps: (1) Naïve Reading: Reading each transcript multiple times to gain a holistic understanding of the participant's experience; (2) Thematic Analysis: Identifying significant statements and phrases that revealed the participant's motivations, challenges, and experiences; (3) Developing Thematic Statements: Formulating thematic statements that captured the essence of the participant's experience related to each identified theme; (4) Exemplification: Selecting illustrative quotes from the transcripts to support and exemplify each thematic statement; (5) Synthesizing Themes: Organizing the thematic statements into overarching themes that represented the core motivational drives and lived experiences of the participants. Hermeneutic interpretation in interpreting the themes within the context of the existing literature and the theoretical framework, seeking to understand the deeper meanings and implications of the participants' experiences.

Trustworthiness

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, the following measures were taken: (1) Credibility: Prolonged engagement with the data, member checking (sharing preliminary findings with participants to ensure accuracy and resonance), and triangulation (using multiple data sources, such as interview transcripts and field notes); (2) Transferability: Providing rich, detailed descriptions of the participants, the context, and the findings to allow readers to determine the applicability of the findings to other settings; (3) Dependability: Maintaining an audit trail of the research process, including interview guides, transcripts, and analysis notes, to allow for external review; (4) Confirmability: Ensuring that the findings are grounded in the data and not influenced by

the researcher's biases. Provide types of and estimates for trustworthiness of qualitative data, including types of dependability and credibility used. If tools were developed for this study, describe the processes employed (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Ethical Consideration

This study was conducted in accordance with ethical principles and guidelines. Informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to the interview, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time. Confidentiality was maintained by using pseudonyms to protect the identities of the participants. The research protocol was reviewed and approved by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Fakultas Ilmu Keperawatan Universitas Advent Indonesia with number 384/KEPK-FIK. UNAI/EC/V/2024.

Results

Table characteristics of the participants including the age of respondents ranged from 33 to 50 years, with a mean age of 43 years. Majority of the participants ($n = 7$; 75%) held a bachelor's degree in nursing. The earliest year of graduation from their initial nursing program was 1993, while the most recent was 2021. In terms of RN licensure in California, the most recent year of attainment was 2023, and the earliest was 2016.

The analysis of the interviews revealed five overarching themes that captured the motivational drives and lived experiences of Indonesian female nursing graduates pursuing RN licensure in California including: (1) Economic Aspirations and the Pursuit of Financial Stability; (2) Professional Growth and the Desire for Advanced Opportunities; (3) Familial Responsibilities and the Drive to Support Loved Ones; (4) The Allure of Western Healthcare Systems and Improved Working Conditions; (5) Navigating Cultural Adjustments and Maintaining Identity in a New Environment

Economic Aspirations and the Pursuit of Financial Stability

The most prominent theme that emerged was the strong desire for financial stability and economic advancement. Participants consistently expressed a desire to improve their financial situation, both for themselves and their families. Nursing salaries in Indonesia were often perceived as inadequate to meet their needs and aspirations. The participants expressed as follow:

"In Indonesia, the salary for nurses is very low. It's not enough to support my family... I wanted to earn more money to give my parents a better life." (Participant 1)

"I worked for almost 3 years in my home country. I realized that the salary I am getting is not sufficient for my personal needs. I have a family to support and the pay rate in California is so much better that it makes it possible from me to give them the comforts that they need." (Participant 4)

"I think most of us (Indonesian nurses) are motivated by the economic factor. We work hard to get our degree but the salary is not rewarding. California is a good option and that motivated to study hard and pass the NCLEX exam." (Participant 8)

Professional Growth and the Desire for Advanced Opportunities

Beyond economic considerations, participants were also motivated by the desire for professional growth and the opportunity to expand their skills and knowledge. The US healthcare system, particularly in California, was seen as offering more advanced training programs, specialized areas of practice, and opportunities for career advancement. The participants' statement such as:

"I wanted to learn more, to be challenged, to work with the latest technology... In Indonesia, the opportunities for specialization are limited." (Participant 3)

"I was impressed with the training and development opportunities that are available to nurses in California. I knew that I could learn a lot and grow as a professional if I came here." (Participant 6)

"I wanted to advance in my career. Back home, I was stuck. There were not many chances to move up. Here, I can become a charge nurse, a supervisor, or even get my master's degree." (Participant 10)

Familial Responsibilities and the Drive to Support Loved Ones

Familial responsibilities played a significant role in motivating participants to pursue RN licensure in California. Many participants felt a strong sense of duty to support their parents, siblings, and other family members. The higher earning potential in California enabled them to provide financial assistance and improve the quality of life for their families back home. The participants' impression as follow:

"My parents worked so hard to put me through nursing school. I wanted to repay them by sending money home and helping them financially." (Participant 2)

"I have younger siblings who are still in school. I want to help them get a good education and have a better future. Working in California allows me to do that." (Participant 5)

"Family is very important to us. It is a cultural obligation of mine that I have to help my family back home. The income opportunity in California has been helping me to give them their needs." (Participant 7)

The Allure of Western Healthcare Systems and Improved Working Conditions

Participants were also drawn to the perceived benefits of working in a Western healthcare system, including better working conditions, adequate staffing ratios, access to resources, and a more supportive work environment. They expressed concerns about the heavy workloads, limited resources, and lack of support they experienced in Indonesian healthcare settings. The participant stated:

"The working conditions in Indonesia are very difficult. We are often understaffed, and we don't have the resources we need to provide good care to our patients. I heard that things are much better in the US." (Participant 2)

"I wanted to work in a place where I felt valued and respected and be able to do my job well. I have heard that the work cultures in California are supportive and fair." (Participant 9)

"Back home, we had so many patients per nurse. Its very tiring and I can't give the care they need. I wanted to work in a place where the nurse/patient ratio is lower so that I can

give quality care." (Participant 8)

Navigating Cultural Adjustments and Maintaining Identity in a New Environment

While the pursuit of RN licensure in California offered numerous opportunities, participants also faced significant challenges in adapting to a new cultural environment. These included language barriers, differences in social norms, feelings of homesickness, and the need to maintain their cultural identity while integrating into American society. The participants expressed:

"It was hard at first to get used to the language and the culture. I missed my family and friends, and I sometimes felt lonely." (Participant 2)

"The cultural differences were very overwhelming in the beginning. But with the help of my friends, I was able to adopt new things. At the same time, I made sure that I still carry my culture with me." (Participant 4)

"I am proud to be Indonesian. I want to share my culture with others and show them that we are hardworking and compassionate people. I celebrate Indonesian holidays to show my culture here." (Participant 8)

"I make an effort to meet other Indonesian nurses to have a sense of community here in the US." (Participant 6)

Discussion

The findings of this study provide valuable insights into the complex motivational drives behind Indonesian female nursing graduates' pursuit of RN licensure in California. The results highlight the interplay of economic aspirations, professional growth desires, familial responsibilities, allure of western healthcare systems, and challenges in cultural adjustment shaping their decisions and experiences.

Economic Aspirations and the Pursuit of Financial Stability

The strong emphasis on economic aspirations aligns with previous research on international nurse migration, which identifies financial incentives as a primary motivator for nurses

seeking employment abroad (Pressley et al., 2022; Villamin et al., 2025). The lower salaries and limited economic opportunities in Indonesia compared to the US make California an attractive destination for nurses seeking to improve their financial stability and support their families. Recent studies further support this trend, highlighting that globally, nurses from low- and middle-income countries are increasingly motivated by the potential for higher earnings, improved working conditions, and opportunities for professional advancement in high-income countries (Brush et al., 2019; Xu et al., 2022). In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic intensified global demand for nurses, making migration to destinations like California more appealing due to job security, competitive compensation, and clearer career progression pathways (WHO, 2020). These economic drivers are intertwined with personal goals, such as achieving long-term family stability and securing better educational opportunities for dependents, reinforcing the appeal of international licensure and migration (Toyin-Thomas et al., 2023).

Professional Growth and the Desire for Advanced Opportunities

The desire for professional growth and advanced opportunities also emerged as a significant motivator. The US healthcare system's reputation for advanced technology, specialized training programs, and career advancement opportunities attracts nurses seeking to expand their skills and knowledge (Brush et al., 2019). The findings suggest that Indonesian female nurses perceive California as a place where they can reach their full professional potential. Recent studies confirm that internationally educated nurses are drawn to healthcare systems offering structured mentorship, continued education, and access to specialty roles, which are often limited in their home countries (Rajpoot et al., 2024; Yoo et al., 2020). Furthermore, the professional recognition and licensing associated with passing the NCLEX-RN are seen not only as gateways to better job prospects but also as symbols of competence and global employability, reinforcing the drive toward career advancement (Xu et al.,

2022).

Familial Responsibilities and the Drive to Support Loved Ones

Family responsibilities played a crucial role in motivating participants to pursue RN licensure in California. This finding underscores the importance of cultural context in understanding international nurse migration. Indonesian culture places a strong emphasis on familial obligations and the desire to provide for loved ones (Roth et al., 2022). The higher earning potential in California enabled nurses to fulfill these cultural expectations and provide financial assistance to their families back home. Recent studies have similarly highlighted that nurses from collectivist societies, such as Indonesia, often migrate not solely for personal advancement but also to support family members through remittances and enhanced social mobility (Ghimire et al., 2024; Hayes et al., 2019). These familial obligations are deeply rooted in cultural identity, with migration decisions frequently involving extended family consultation and long-term planning to uplift household well-being (WHO, 2020; Xu et al., 2022). Therefore, economic migration among Indonesian nurses cannot be viewed solely through an individualistic lens but must also consider the broader social and cultural dynamics at play.

The Allure of Western Healthcare Systems and Improved Working Conditions

The allure of Western healthcare systems and improved working conditions was another significant motivator. The participants expressed concerns about the challenging working conditions, heavy workloads, and limited resources they experienced in Indonesian healthcare settings (Hariyati et al., 2016). The prospect of working in a more supportive and well-resourced healthcare environment in California was a major draw. Recent literature supports this perspective, noting that nurses from low- and middle-income countries often face inadequate staffing, insufficient equipment, and high patient-to-nurse ratios, which contribute to job dissatisfaction and burnout (Budiharto

& Bowers, 2017; Hayes et al., 2019). In contrast, Western healthcare systems are perceived to offer safer nurse-patient ratios, advanced technologies, ongoing professional development, and organizational support that enhances job satisfaction and patient care quality (Al-Yateem et al., 2022; Xu et al., 2022). These comparative advantages strengthen the appeal of migration for nurses seeking professional fulfillment and improved quality of life.

Navigating Cultural Adjustments and Maintaining Identity in a New Environment

These findings suggest that maintaining cultural identity can serve as a protective factor against acculturative stress, fostering psychological well-being and a stronger sense of belonging (Chen et al., 2021). Participants often relied on cultural practices, such as celebrating national holidays and connecting with fellow Indonesian nurses, to preserve their identity and feel grounded in their new environment. Such practices not only helped them cope with the emotional and social challenges of migration but also provided a sense of continuity, empowerment, and cultural pride (Alquwez et al., 2021; Kim & Lee, 2020). Support networks, whether through ethnic communities, peer groups, or religious affiliations, played a vital role in helping participants navigate identity reconstruction and adapt to the cultural expectations of the host country (Zhou et al., 2023; Goh & Lopez, 2022). Ultimately, these networks acted as both emotional and cultural anchors, facilitating smoother transitions, enhancing psychological resilience, and supporting the professional integration of immigrant nurses into diverse healthcare systems (Lee et al., 2021).

Limitations and Implications

This study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size was relatively small (n=10), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of Indonesian female nurses in California. Second, the participants were recruited

through snowball sampling, which may have introduced bias into the sample. Third, the interviews were conducted in English, which may have limited the participants' ability to fully express their experiences. The study also focused solely on nurses who have already successfully migrated to California, so the experiences of those who were not able to obtain their RN licenses in the US may be different.

The findings of this study have several important implications for practice and policy, including (1) Healthcare Organizations: Healthcare organizations should develop culturally sensitive recruitment and retention strategies to attract and retain Indonesian female nurses. This includes offering competitive compensation packages, providing opportunities for professional development, and creating a supportive work environment; (2) Nursing Education Programs: Nursing education programs in Indonesia should prepare students for the challenges of working in international healthcare settings. This includes providing training in English language skills, cultural sensitivity, and US healthcare practices; (3) Policymakers: Policymakers should develop policies that support the integration and well-being of international nurses. This includes streamlining the licensure process, providing access to affordable housing and healthcare, and promoting cultural diversity in the healthcare workforce; (4) Mentorship Programs: Implementing mentorship programs that pair experienced nurses with incoming Indonesian nurses can alleviate acculturation challenges.

Conclusion

This hermeneutic phenomenological study provides valuable insights into the motivational drives and lived experiences of Indonesian female nursing graduates pursuing RN licensure in California. The findings highlight the complex interplay of economic aspirations, professional growth desires, familial responsibilities, and challenges in cultural adjustment shaping their decisions and experiences. By understanding these factors, healthcare organizations, policymakers, and nursing education programs can develop

more effective strategies to support the integration and well-being of international nurses and ensure a diverse and culturally competent healthcare workforce. The experiences of these nurses continue to influence the globalization of healthcare and their contribution to the nursing profession. Future research should address the limitations of this study by using larger and more diverse samples. Additional research is needed to explore the experiences of Indonesian female nurses who have not been successful in obtaining RN licensure in the US. Longitudinal studies could examine the long-term career trajectories and well-being of Indonesian female nurses in California.

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