Vietnam Journal of Community Medicine, Vol. 67, English version No. 1, 2026, 25-28

WILLINGNESS TO WORK ABROAD AMONG NURSING STUDENTS AT TRA VINH UNIVERSITY IN 2024

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Received: 22/01/2026
Revised: 20/03/2026; Accepted: 18/05/2026

ABSTRACT

Growing international demand for nurses has expanded overseas employment opportunities for nursing graduates, including those in Vietnam. However, evidence on Vietnamese nursing students' willingness to work abroad remains limited.

Objectives: To assess the proportion of nursing students' willing to work abroad, their preferred destinations, perceived barriers, and associated factors.

Methods: A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted from May to July 2024 among undergraduate nursing students (years 1–4) at Tra Vinh University, Vietnam (n = 430). Data were collected using a structured questionnaire covering demographic characteristics, willingness to work abroad, preferred destinations, and perceived barriers, and analyzed with descriptive statistics and chi-square tests.

Results: Overall, 51.6% of students reported willingness to work abroad. Japan (50.9%) and Germany (32.0%) were the most preferred destinations. The main perceived barriers were language limitations (75.2%) and insufficient professional preparedness (54.5%). Anticipated challenges during overseas employment included job pressure (73.4%) and cultural differences (57.2%). Living arrangement was the only factor significantly associated with willingness to work abroad (p = 0.045).

Conclusions: More than half of nursing students expressed intention to pursue overseas employment, particularly in Japan and Germany. Addressing language proficiency, clinical readiness, and pre-departure preparation is essential to support students' international career aspirations while ensuring sustainable workforce development.

Keywords: Nursing students,Willingness to work abroad, Overseas employment.

1. INTRODUCTION

Globalization has made overseas employment an increasingly common career pathway for nurses, driven by workforce shortages in many high-income countries. Nations such as Japan and Germany face significant nursing shortages due to aging populations and rising healthcare demands, leading to formal recruitment agreements with countries including Vietnam. Consequently, Vietnam has emerged as a potential source of nursing professionals for the international labor market.

In the Asia-Pacific region, nurse migration has attracted growing attention. While most nursing students intend to work domestically, a considerable proportion express interest in international careers, as reported in studies from the Philippines and Indonesia. In Vietnam, labor export policies have expanded in recent years, and nursing has been increasingly integrated into overseas employment programs. Previous Vietnamese studies indicate that approximately one-third to nearly one-half of nursing students intend to work abroad, although reported proportions vary across regions and institutions. Specifically, Tran et al. (2018) reported that 42.4% of nursing students in Nam Dinh desired to work overseas. Vu et al. (2021) found a rate of 37.7% among students in Haiphong, while Vo et al. (2024) reported a higher rate of 47.3% in Da Nang.

Working abroad is perceived by many nursing students as an opportunity for higher income, professional development, and personal growth. However, large-scale nurse migration may also affect domestic healthcare workforce stability, underscoring the need for evidence-based workforce planning. Understanding nursing students' willingness to work abroad, their preferred destinations, perceived barriers, and associated factors is therefore essential for both educational institutions and policymakers. Accordingly, this study aimed to assess the willingness to work abroad among nursing students at Tra Vinh University in 2024, identify preferred destination.

2. SUBJECTS AND METHODS

2.1. Research Methods Study Setting and Design

A descriptive cross-sectional study was conducted from May to July 2024. The study took place at the School of Medicine and Pharmacy, Tra Vinh University, and affiliated clinical sites including Tra Vinh General Hospital and Tra Vinh Obstetrics and Pediatrics Hospital.

2.2. Study Subjects and Sample Size: A census

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sampling approach was used, recruiting all undergraduate nursing students (years 1–4) enrolled in 2024. The final sample size was 430 students.

2.3. Measurements and Variables: Data were collected using a structured self-administered questionnaire. The primary dependent variable was "willingness to work abroad," assessed as a binary variable (Yes/No) by asking students whether they have considered working overseas after graduation. Independent variables included demographic characteristics (gender, age, ethnicity, religion, year of study, living arrangement, marital status, family economic status, parents' occupation), self-rated language ability, prior overseas experience, preferred destinations, and perceived barriers.

2.4. Data Collection and Statistical Analysis: Surveys were administered in person in classrooms and clinical settings and completed anonymously. Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics version 22.0. Descriptive statistics were reported as frequencies and percentages. Associated factors were examined using Chi-square tests and Odds Ratios (OR) with 95% Confidence Intervals (CI), with statistical significance set at $p < 0.05$. Ethical approval was obtained from the Ethics Committee of Tra Vinh University, and informed consent was obtained from all participants.ountries, examine perceived barriers, and explore factors associated with students' intentions.

3. RESULTS

A total of 430 undergraduate nursing students participated. Most participants were female (82.3%) and aged 20 or younger (57.9%). The cohort was predominantly of Kinh ethnicity (80.2%). A majority of students were living in rented houses/rooms (60.0%), followed by living with family (22.6%) and in dormitories (17.4%). Almost all students (99.1%) reported no prior overseas experience.

Table 1. General characteristics of participants (n = 430)

Characteristic	n	%
Gender		
Female	354	82.3
Male	76	17.7
Age (years)		
≤ 20	249	57.9
≥ 21	181	42.1
Ethnicity		
Kinh	345	80.2
Khmer	82	19.1
Hoa	3	0.7
Living arrangement		
With family	97	22.6
Dormitory	75	17.4
Rented house/room	258	60.0
Prior overseas experience		
No	426	99.1
Yes	4	0.9

Willingness to work abroad and preferred destinations Overall, 222/430 students (51.6%) reported willingness to work abroad after graduation; 208 (48.4%) were not willing.

Table 2. Willingness to work abroad (n = 430)

Outcome	n	%
Willing to work abroad	222	51.6
Not willing	208	48.4

Among the 222 students willing to work abroad, Japan was the most preferred destination (50.9%), followed closely by Germany (32.0%).

Table 3. Preferred destination countries (n = 222)

Destination	n	%
Japan	113	50.9
Germany	71	32.0
Taiwan	20	9.0
South Korea	18	8.1

Perceived barriers to working abroad When considering overseas employment, the most frequently reported barriers were language limitations (75.2%) and insufficient professional qualifications (54.5%). When anticipating challenges during overseas work, the leading concerns were job pressure/workload (73.4%) and cultural differences (57.2%).

Table 4. Key perceived barriers/challenges (n = 222)

Domain	Item	n	%
Planning/ considering abroad	Language barriers	167	75.2
	Insufficient professional qualifications	121	54.5
	Personal health	90	40.5
	Family agreement	71	32.0
	Information access	70	31.5
	No money (Deposit/guarantee)	52	23.4
Working abroad	Job pressure/ workload	163	73.4
	Cultural/lifestyle differences	127	57.2
	Living conditions/ routine	105	47.3
	Traffic	33	14.9

Factors associated with willingness to work abroad Most examined variables (gender, year of study, language ability) were not significantly associated with willingness to work abroad ($p > 0.05$). The only significant factor was current living arrangement. Students living with their families or in dormitories showed a higher willingness compared to those living in rented rooms ($p = 0.045$).

Table 5. Factors associated with willingness to work abroad (n = 430)

Factor	Total (n=430)	Willing (n=222) n (%)	Not willing (n=208) n (%)	OR (95% CI)	p-value
Gender					
Female	354	185 (52.3%)	169 (47.7%)	1.154 (0.703–1.894)	0.57
Male	76	37 (48.7%)	39 (51.3%)	1	
Living arrangement					
Family/Dormitory	172	99 (57.6%)	73 (42.4%)	1	0.045
Rented house/room	258	123 (47.7%)	135 (52.3%)	0.672 (0.455–0.991)	
Year of study					
Year 1	145	78 (53.8%)	67 (46.2%)		>0.05
Year 2	110	56 (50.9%)	54 (49.1%)		
Year 3	104	49 (47.1%)	55 (52.9%)		
Year 4	71	39 (54.9%)	32 (45.1%)		
Language ability					
Basic/Intermediate	256	130 (50.8%)	126 (49.2%)	0.920 (0.625–1.352)	0.67
None	174	92 (52.9%)	82 (47.1%)	1	

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to assess the willingness to work abroad among nursing students at Tra Vinh University, identifying preferred destinations, barriers, and associated factors. In this survey, 51.6% of nursing students reported a willingness to work abroad, indicating that overseas employment is a highly relevant career option for a substantial proportion of Vietnamese nursing undergraduates. Japan and Germany were the most preferred destinations. Language barriers and professional readiness were the main obstacles, while living arrangement was the only significant associated factor.

The proportion of students willing to work abroad (51.6%) is higher than previous reports in Vietnam, such as Vu et al. in Haiphong (37.7%) and Tran et al. in Nam Dinh (42.4%), and slightly higher than Vo et al. in Da Nang (47.3%). This growing trend may reflect increased awareness of global workforce demands and the active international cooperation programs at Tra Vinh University. Regarding destinations, Japan (50.9%) and Germany (32.0%) dominated preferences. This is consistent with national trends and reflects established bilateral recruitment pathways, structured caregiver/nursing programs, and strong workforce demand in these nations.

Language barriers (75.2%) and perceived gaps in professional readiness (54.5%) were the most prominent obstacles at the planning stage. This finding emphasizes the need for structured language preparation—especially aligned with destination requirements—and competency -based clinical training. Furthermore, students anticipated high job pressure (73.4%) and cultural adjustment challenges (57.2%) abroad, suggesting that pre-departure training should go beyond professional skills to include workplace adaptation and cultural competence.

Notably, living arrangement was the only factor significantly associated with willingness to work abroad (p = 0.045). Students living with family or in dormitories showed a higher intention to migrate than those renting independently. This contrasts with some assumptions but highlights that immediate living environments and possibly family support mechanisms play a crucial role in students' career aspirations. Other demographic factors, such as gender, age, and language ability, did not show statistically significant associations in this cohort.

This study has certain limitations. First, its cross-sectional design restricts the ability to establish causal relationships between independent variables and the intention to work abroad. Second, it was conducted at a single university with a diverse mix of first-to-fourth-year students, which may limit the generalizability of the findings to the broader population of nursing students in Vietnam. Future multi-site studies and mixed-methods approaches are recommended to better explain the motivations and decision-making processes

5. CONCLUSION

More than half of the nursing students (51.6%) at Tra Vinh University expressed a willingness to work abroad, primarily targeting Japan and Germany. Key barriers include limited language proficiency, professional readiness, anticipated job pressure, and cultural differences. Current living arrangement was the only factor significantly associated with overseas intention. To support this trend, nursing programs should enhance targeted foreign language and clinical training, offer comprehensive career guidance on international opportunities, and collaborate with policymakers to prepare students for the demands of the global healthcare workforce.

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