



Transnational Migration of Filipino Pharmacists: A Structured Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

Global labor mobility includes healthcare professional migration, which affects workforce sustainability, healthcare delivery, and human resource planning. Due to economic opportunity, professional advancement, and global healthcare needs, Filipino pharmacists are migrating abroad. However, literature specific to pharmacist migration is scarcer than other healthcare professions. This structured literature review examined Filipino pharmacists' international migration, including migration reasons, employment mobility, professional adaptability, psychosocial experiences, and workforce implications. Identification, screening, and synthesis of relevant scholarly and institutional material were carried out using a structured literature review process. Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus-indexed journals, peer-reviewed journals, WHO publications, ILO reports, and Philippine government policy documents were searched for studies from January 2019 to May 2026. Screening was based on inclusion and exclusion criteria, and a thematic synthesis identified migration patterns. After screening and full-text examination, 17 research and institutional sources were included from 75 records. Economic incentives, professional growth, labor mobility, cultural and professional adaptability, psychosocial obstacles, and coping resilience were common topics in the literature. Migration is driven by compensation, career possibilities, workforce dissatisfaction, and rising global healthcare demand, the study found. Migrants must acclimate to new healthcare systems, licensure requirements, workplace expectations, and cultures. Outward migration may boost professional growth and labor mobility, but it may threaten Philippine workforce retention and healthcare sustainability. Filipino pharmacists' transnational migration is a multifaceted workforce issue involving labor mobility, professional adaptation, and healthcare workforce planning. Pharmacist-specific migration literature is scarce, emphasizing the necessity of profession-centered research and evidence-informed policy to enhance Philippine pharmaceutical workforce sustainability and resilience.

KEYWORDS: *Filipino Pharmacists; Transnational Migration; Healthcare Workforce Migration; Overseas Filipino Workers; Structured Literature Review*

1. INTRODUCTION

The migration of healthcare professionals has become a defining feature of global labor mobility, with major consequences for healthcare delivery, workforce sustainability, and health systems development. The World Health Organization has projected an imbalance between the global supply and demand of healthcare workers, particularly affecting developing countries such as the Philippines. Within this broader context, the pharmacy workforce continues to experience increasing pressure due to rising healthcare demands, population aging, and the availability of more favorable professional opportunities abroad (Salo et al., 2025). As integral members of the healthcare team, pharmacists play a critical role in medication management, patient care, and public health services amid increasingly complex global health challenges (Faller et al., 2020).

Healthcare systems across many countries increasingly depend on foreign-trained healthcare professionals to address workforce shortages and sustain healthcare continuity. As a result, workforce retention and long-term professional sustainability have become major concerns requiring legislative support and strategic workforce development interventions (Wong et al., 2021). Existing literature consistently frames migration as a multifactorial process influenced by structural push and pull dynamics. Economic disparities, inadequate working conditions, and limited career advancement opportunities in home countries are frequently identified as major push factors, while higher compensation, improved working environments, and broader professional opportunities in destination countries function as strong pull factors driving healthcare migration (Leitão et al., 2024).

For low- and middle-income countries, strengthening health systems and workforce development remains essential to reduce dependence on migration as a response to workforce shortages (Eaton et al., 2023). At the same time, migration has also been examined within broader economic frameworks. Abarcar and Theoharides (2021) discussed the “brain gain” or “induced investment” perspective, wherein international migration pathways may serve as economic accelerators and opportunities for professional advancement. These contrasting perspectives highlight that healthcare migration should not be viewed solely as labor mobility but as a multidimensional issue involving workforce retention, economic development, and health system resilience.

In the Philippine context, labor migration has long been embedded within national economic and employment strategies. The exported labor program introduced during the Martial Law era served as a provisional response to unemployment and economic concerns, while subsequent amendments to the Labor Code strengthened policies intended to protect migrant workers and their families (Sale & Sale, 2024). The Philippines remains one of the major exporters of healthcare professionals, including nurses, physicians, medical technologists, and pharmacists. Filipino pharmacists migrate to countries in the Middle East, North America, Europe, and the Asia-Pacific region in pursuit of better salaries, improved working conditions, and wider professional opportunities. These migration trends reflect the intersection of national labor mobility, professional advancement, and workforce redistribution.

Although Filipino pharmacists possess competencies that support participation in international healthcare systems, workforce retention within the local healthcare setting remains a continuing challenge. Faller et al. (2020) reported that ASEAN pharmacists demonstrate moderate to high levels of professional knowledge and competencies necessary to contribute to global health improvement. However, Carandang et al. (2024) identified dissatisfaction with salary, limited incentives and promotion opportunities, and inadequate staffing as major factors influencing pharmacists’ intention to resign.

These findings suggest that pharmacist migration is influenced not only by opportunities abroad but also by persistent workplace conditions within domestic healthcare systems that affect professional satisfaction, workforce stability, and long-term retention. The increasing movement of healthcare

professionals also reflects broader changes in transnational labor systems and global health service mobility. Although the relationship between international trade in services and health worker migration remains inadequately explored, both global trade in health services and healthcare workforce mobility have increased substantially recently (World Trade Organization, 2019).

Through transnational migration, Filipino pharmacists maintain economic, professional, and social connections with the Philippines while simultaneously adapting to foreign healthcare systems and cultural environments. Caino and Castillote (2024) further identified an unfavorable work culture, an excessive workload, inadequate salary and benefits, workplace inequality, abuse of authority, and limited career advancement opportunities as major factors influencing healthcare professionals' decisions to work abroad.

These findings suggest that migration involves professional, social, and cultural adaptation beyond employment mobility. As pharmacists continue to assume expanding responsibilities within healthcare systems globally, understanding their migration experiences becomes increasingly important for workforce planning, professional development, and migration policy formulation. Existing literature highlights determinants such as migration decision-making, workforce mobility variables, pharmacy employment opportunities abroad, prior professional experience in the Philippines, workplace dynamics in foreign healthcare settings, and compensation-related considerations (Madrid et al., 2022).

Pharmacist-specific migration literature remains comparatively limited relative to broader studies involving other healthcare professions, restricting a deeper understanding of profession-specific workforce implications and migration experiences.

This review contributes to the limited pharmacist-specific migration literature by synthesizing emerging evidence on transnational mobility, professional adaptation, and workforce implications among Filipino pharmacists. By examining migration through workforce, professional, and policy perspectives, this review aims to strengthen understanding of pharmacist migration as a critical issue in healthcare sustainability, labor mobility, and long-term human resource planning in the Philippines.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

The migratory experiences of Filipino pharmacists can be elucidated using the Push–Pull Theory of migration, which posits that economic and professional constraints in the home country interact with opportunities overseas. Lee's (1966) Push–Pull Theory suggests that the diaspora of Filipino pharmaceutical professionals is influenced by a complex interaction between home pressures and attractive international prospects.

2. METHODS

2.1. Research Design

This study utilized a structured literature review methodology to comprehensively analyze and synthesize existing research on the global transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists. A structured literature review was employed to systematically identify, evaluate, and synthesize relevant literature.

2.2. Sources of Literature

Relevant literature was retrieved from the following electronic databases and institutional sources:

1. Google Scholar
2. PubMed
3. Scopus-indexed journals
4. World Health Organization (WHO) publications
5. International Labour Organization (ILO) reports
6. Philippine government publications and policy documents
7. Peer-reviewed local and international journals

2.3. Search Strategy

1. The literature search used combinations of the following keywords:
2. “Filipino pharmacist migration”
3. “Transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists”
4. “Overseas Filipino pharmacists”
5. “Healthcare workforce migration Philippines”
6. “Global pharmacist migration”
7. “Filipino healthcare professionals abroad”

The search was conducted using Boolean combinations of keywords such as “Filipino pharmacist migration” AND “healthcare workforce migration” OR “overseas Filipino pharmacists” across selected databases.

2.4. Inclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they:

1. Were published between January 2019 and May 2026
2. Were written in English
3. Focused on healthcare worker migration involving Filipino professionals
4. Included pharmacist-related migration, workforce mobility, or professional integration
5. Discussed migration experiences, employment conditions, adaptation, or policy implications
6. Were peer-reviewed research articles, policy papers, or institutional reports

2.5. Exclusion Criteria

The review excluded:

1. Duplicate publications
2. Non-peer-reviewed opinion articles
3. Conference abstracts without accessible full text
4. Studies unrelated to healthcare migration
5. Literature lacking relevance to Filipino migrant professionals

2.6. Screening and Selection of Literature

The selection process was conducted in three stages:

1. Initial Identification – Relevant literature was identified through database searches using predefined keywords.
2. Title and Abstract Screening – Retrieved studies were screened according to relevance and alignment with the objectives of the review.
3. Full-Text Review – Eligible studies underwent full-text assessment prior to inclusion in the final review.

2.7. Data Extraction

Relevant information extracted from the selected literature included:

1. Author and year of publication
2. Country or migration destination
3. Study objectives
4. Research methodology
5. Key findings related to migration experiences
6. Workforce and policy implications
7. Extracted data were organized and categorized for thematic synthesis.

Figure 1: Study Selection Overview of the Reviewed Literature

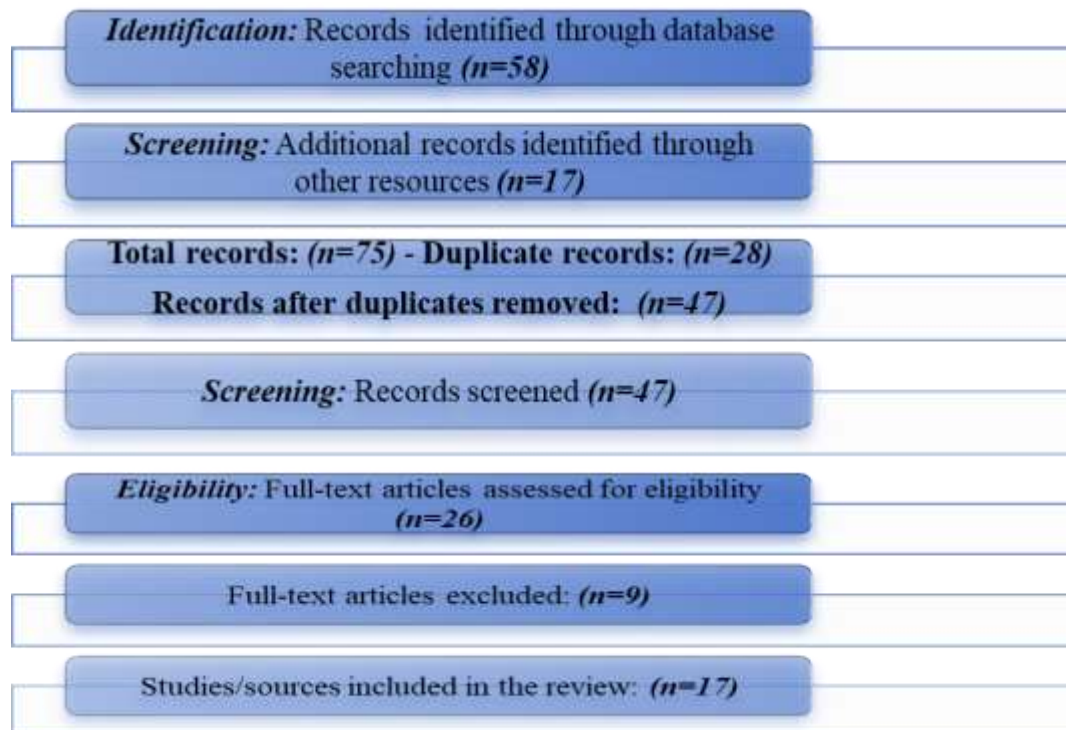


Figure 1 presents the study selection process and screening procedure used to identify the included literature. A total of 75 articles were initially identified, of which 17 studies/sources met the inclusion criteria after screening and full-text review.

2.8. Data Analysis

The study utilized thematic synthesis to identify recurring concepts and patterns across the reviewed literature. Themes were developed according to similarities in findings related to:

1. Migration motivations
2. Professional opportunities
3. Workforce integration
4. Cultural adaptation
5. Psychosocial experiences
6. Migration governance and workforce policy

Thematic analysis facilitated the identification of broader migration trends and policy-related concerns affecting Filipino pharmacists globally.

Table 1. Summary Matrix of Included Studies

Author(s) & Year	Study Focus	Design / Methodology	Major Findings	Relevance to Present Review
Abarcar & Theoharides (2021)	Medical worker migration and human capital development	Quantitative economic analysis	Migration opportunities may encourage investment in healthcare education and training	Supports migration as both a workforce challenge and economic opportunity
Atento et al. (2025)	Global health workforce gaps and Philippine supply fragilities	Multilevel workforce analysis	Global healthcare shortages continue to increase demand for foreign-trained healthcare workers	Highlights growing international demand affecting Filipino pharmacists
Caino & Castillote (2024)	International migration of Filipino healthcare professionals	Literature review	Poor work conditions, inadequate salary, and limited career growth contribute to migration decisions	Identifies major push factors influencing migration
Carandang et al. (2024)	Burnout and turnover intention among Filipino pharmacists	Cross-sectional quantitative study	Burnout, inadequate staffing, and dissatisfaction with compensation contributed to turnover intention among pharmacists	Highlights workforce dissatisfaction and migration-related push factors
Eaton et al. (2023)	Impact of global health worker migration	Policy analysis / review	Migration may weaken healthcare systems in low- and middle-income countries	Emphasizes workforce sustainability concerns
Flotildes et al. (2023)	Lived experiences and resilience of hospital pharmacists during COVID-19	Interpretative phenomenological analysis	Pharmacists demonstrated resilience and adaptive coping strategies amid professional and emotional challenges	Supports themes related to psychosocial adaptation and resilience
Faller et al. (2020)	Pharmacists' competencies in global health	Exploratory survey study	ASEAN pharmacists demonstrate competencies necessary for global healthcare practice	Supports the readiness of Filipino pharmacists for international practice
Kawaguchi-Suzuki et al. (2019)	Cultural sensitivity and pharmacy engagement in Asia	Cross-cultural qualitative analysis	Filipino pharmacists may experience adaptation and confidence challenges in foreign practice settings	Highlights cultural and professional adjustment issues

Lee (1966)	Push–Pull Theory of migration	Theoretical paper	Migration is influenced by push and pull factors between origin and destination countries	Provides theoretical framework for migration analysis
Leitão et al. (2024)	Drivers of global healthcare worker migration	Review study	Salary, career advancement, and quality of life are major migration drivers	Explains motivations behind overseas migration
Luna (2025)	Skilled migration and transnational family relationships	Qualitative doctoral study	Migration affects family relationships, emotional well-being, and social connections	Provides insight into psychosocial aspects of migration
Madrid et al. (2022)	Migration trends among Filipino pharmacists	Phenomenological study	Filipino pharmacists migrate for professional advancement and better compensation	Provides pharmacist-specific migration evidence
Sale & Sale (2024)	Philippine labor export policy and healthcare migration	Case study / policy analysis	State labor export policies significantly influence healthcare worker migration	Explains structural and policy-related migration factors
Salo et al. (2025)	Pharmacy workforce in the Philippines	Health labor market analysis	Workforce shortages and retention problems remain significant in the Philippines	Demonstrates local workforce implications of migration
Sweileh (2024)	Research trends on international migration of health workers	Bibliometric analysis	Better training opportunities and work environments attract migrant healthcare workers	Supports professional advancement theme
Wong et al. (2021)	Pharmacy workforce shortages in underserved areas	Comparative case study	Workforce retention strategies and policy reforms are necessary to sustain pharmacy services	Relevant to pharmacist retention and workforce planning
World Trade Organization (2019)	International health worker mobility and trade in services	Policy report	Global trade in health services and mobility of healthcare workers continue to increase	Provides international policy context for healthcare migration

Table 1 displays the summary matrix of the seventeen articles and sources examined in this structured literature review on the transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists. The studies collectively enhance the understanding of the factors affecting the migration of Filipino pharmacists and other healthcare professionals, along with the consequences for workforce sustainability and healthcare human resource planning.

2.9. Ethical Considerations

This study employed publicly accessible literature and secondary data sources; therefore, formal participant permission was unnecessary. Accurate citation and acknowledgment of all cited materials were upheld to ensure academic integrity and ethical study.

2.10 Limitations

The review was limited by the scarcity of pharmacist-specific migration studies and reliance on English-language publications. Most included studies focused broadly on healthcare professionals rather than exclusively on pharmacists, limiting profession-specific analysis.

3. RESULTS

The reviewed literature identified several recurring themes associated with the transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists and other migrant healthcare professionals.

3.1. Economic Motivation

The social, cultural, historical legacies, and structural elements significantly influenced these migrations (Luna, 2025). These factors complemented the economic motivations influencing migration decisions. Migration was regularly linked to higher income, improved financial stability, and the capacity to support family members through remittances.

3.2. Professional Advancement

Sweileh (2024) reported that the principal attraction factors encompass prospects for further training, enhanced quality of life, and optimal practice settings. Across the reviewed literature, professional advancement consistently emerged as a major pull factor influencing pharmacist migration.

3.3. Workforce Mobility and Global Demand

Atento et al. (2025) assert that rectifying global health workforce shortages requires coordinated investments in workforce development, competency alignment, and deliberate modernization of the pipeline. The global deficit of healthcare professionals has heightened the need for foreign-trained pharmacists across various nations and healthcare systems.

3.4. Cultural and Professional Adaptation

Kawaguchi-Suzuki et al. (2019) suggests that within the pharmacy environment, Filipinos may demonstrate a lack of confidence in their knowledge and skills, especially if they do not possess a PharmD degree or clinical practice experience. Prevalent hurdles included linguistic obstacles, workplace acclimatization, professional licensure stipulations, and adaptation to international healthcare methodologies and societal conventions.

3.5. Psychosocial Challenges

Carandang et al. (2024) emphasizes that burnout among pharmacists is a growing issue, with previous studies highlighting its physical, psychological, and professional consequences. Migration-related concerns encompassed nostalgia, familial separation, social alienation, and emotional adaptation.

3.6. Coping and Resilience

Flotildes et al. (2023) contend that constructive coping strategies and viewpoints are crucial for overcoming personal and professional challenges. It is advisable to formulate strategies designed to bolster resilience and, hence, overall health and well-being. Filipino migrant professionals typically

depended on social support networks, familial communication, religious observances, and individual fortitude to acclimate to new settings.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this review support Lee's (1966) push-pull theory of migration, showing that the transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists is shaped by both structural limitations within the domestic healthcare system and professional opportunities abroad. Inadequate compensation, workforce dissatisfaction, limited career advancement, and workplace-related challenges emerged as major push factors, while higher salaries, improved working conditions, professional growth, and increasing global healthcare demand functioned as key pull factors. These findings suggest that pharmacist migration is not solely an economic response but a broader workforce issue influenced by labor mobility, professional inequities, and healthcare system conditions.

A critical synthesis of the literature indicates that migration among Filipino pharmacists reflects both individual career advancement and underlying workforce vulnerabilities within the Philippine healthcare setting. While migration may provide financial stability and expanded professional opportunities, sustained outward mobility may also contribute to workforce retention concerns, particularly in healthcare environments already affected by staffing limitations and increasing service demands. This highlights the tension between international labor mobility and domestic pharmaceutical workforce sustainability.

The review also demonstrates that migration extends beyond employment transfer and involves significant professional, cultural, and psychosocial adaptation. Filipino pharmacists encounter challenges related to workplace integration, licensure requirements, healthcare system differences, cultural adjustment, and psychosocial pressures in foreign settings. Despite these barriers, resilience and adaptive coping remain important factors supporting professional adjustment and workforce mobility.

A major finding of this review is the limited availability of pharmacist-specific migration literature. Existing studies largely focus on broader healthcare workforce migration, particularly among nurses and physicians, leaving pharmacist-centered migration experiences, workforce trajectories, and long-term professional implications comparatively underexplored.

Collectively, these findings highlight the need to examine pharmacist migration within broader workforce planning and public policy frameworks. Strengthening workforce retention, professional support systems, and migration governance may contribute to improved migrant welfare while supporting long-term pharmaceutical workforce sustainability and healthcare resilience in the Philippines.

CONCLUSION

The transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists is driven by economic opportunity, career advancement, global labor mobility, and increasing international demand for healthcare professionals. Across the reviewed literature, improved compensation, professional growth, and expanded career opportunities consistently emerged as major migration drivers. However, migration also involves structural, professional, and psychosocial challenges related to workforce integration, cultural adaptation, and long-term professional adjustment within foreign healthcare systems.

This review demonstrates that pharmacist migration is a significant workforce and policy issue with implications for healthcare sustainability, pharmaceutical service capacity, and workforce equity in

the Philippines. While migration may facilitate professional development and knowledge transfer, sustained outward mobility without effective retention strategies may contribute to workforce attrition and healthcare system strain.

Despite the growing relevance of healthcare migration, Filipino pharmacists remain understudied compared with other healthcare professionals. This evidence gap limits understanding of pharmacist-specific mobility, professional adaptation, and workforce outcomes, leading to the need for profession-centered and policy-oriented research.

The findings further suggest that migration governance should extend beyond labor deployment and remittance generation toward evidence-informed workforce planning. Strengthening compensation, career development opportunities, professional support systems, and workforce monitoring may improve pharmacist retention and pharmaceutical workforce resilience. Policy reforms involving ethical recruitment, labor protection, professional recognition, psychosocial support, and reintegration programs are also necessary to safeguard migrant pharmacists and support workforce continuity.

Future studies should adopt profession-specific, comparative, longitudinal, and mixed-method approaches to better understand migration trajectories, workforce outcomes, and the broader institutional and sociocultural factors influencing migration decisions. Understanding the transnational migration of Filipino pharmacists remains essential for ethical migration governance, evidence-based workforce planning, and the long-term sustainability of the Philippine healthcare system.

Disclosure of AI-Assisted Writing

AI-enhanced tools such as ChatGPT and QuillBot were used for linguistic refinement and clarity. All intellectual material, analysis, and interpretation are attributed solely to the author.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there are no conflicts of interest associated with the publication of this paper.

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