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Working Paper

From Highly Skilled to Low Skilled: Revisiting the Deskilling of Migrant Labor

PIDS Discussion Paper Series, No. 2013-30

Provided in Cooperation with:

Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), Philippines

Suggested Citation: Siar, Sheila V. (2013) : From Highly Skilled to Low Skilled: Revisiting the Deskilling of Migrant Labor, PIDS Discussion Paper Series, No. 2013-30, Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS), Makati City

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/126949>

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Philippine Institute for Development Studies
Surian sa mga Pag-aaral Pangkaunlaran ng Pilipinas

From Highly Skilled to Low Skilled: Revisiting the Deskilling of Migrant Labor

Sheila V. Siar

DISCUSSION PAPER SERIES NO. 2013-30

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April 2013

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From highly skilled to low skilled: Revisiting the deskilling of migrant labor

Sheila Siar

Abstract

Traditional immigration countries such as United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand give preference to migrants with higher education, skills, and professional training that they can transfer to their countries. However, it is not unusual for migrant professionals, especially those from less developed countries, to experience ‘deskilling’ or occupational downward mobility. Though admitted as professionals based on the immigration policies of the destination countries, many of them are relegated to lower status and lower paying jobs, owing to the nonrecognition of their foreign credentials and the bias for education acquired in the host country or in academic institutions in developed countries, local experience, cultural know-how, and English proficiency. Their foreign credentials and skills often fail to provide the expected occupational rewards and professional development gains which have been a significant part of their motivation to migrate overseas, especially to more developed countries. Deskilling may be viewed in several ways: as a host country’s way of filling up labor scarcities in the secondary market by exploiting cheap enclave labor, as a transitional phase for migrants to adjust to the ‘standards’ of the host country, or as a form of institutionalized discrimination. This paper reviews the deskilling phenomenon to highlight its deleterious effects on migrants’ welfare. Some theoretical explanations of deskilling are also examined. Examples of deskilling experiences of different migrant groups show that it is a complex phenomenon that demonstrates the interplay of race, ethnicity, and gender.

Keywords: skilled migration, migrant labor, deskilling, job devaluation, brain waste

From highly skilled to low skilled: Revisiting the deskilling of migrant labor

*Sheila Siar*¹

I. Introduction

Many traditional immigration countries such as United States, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand give preference to people with higher education, skills, and professional training that they can transfer to their countries. For example, in New Zealand, the 1987 Immigration Act and succeeding reforms thereafter have paved the way for the entry of skilled people from non-traditional sources. Persons seeking admittance are evaluated not on the basis of their race or nationality but whether or not they meet the specified requirements in terms of age, education, profession, business interest, or asset that they can transfer to New Zealand. The new act puts a clear emphasis on persons with education and skills that are needed in New Zealand.

Nevertheless, although the education and skills of highly skilled migrants are recognized at the time of entry, it is not uncommon for them to experience ‘deskilling’ or to be deployed to positions much lower than their education, training or experience, when they start to participate in the domestic labor market. Though admitted as professionals based on the immigration policies of the destination countries, many of them, especially those from less developed countries and educated or trained overseas, are relegated to lower status and lower paying jobs, owing to the nonrecognition of their foreign credentials and the bias for education acquired in the host country or in academic institutions in developed countries, local experience, cultural know-how, and English proficiency.

A host country’s failure to recognize the skills and education of their migrant professionals, which to begin with has been the basis for their admission, is a direct deception to these migrants. From a human rights perspective, deskilling is a form of brain abuse (Bauder 2003). Deskilling not only results in economic losses for migrants, but also in psychological and health problems. Affected migrants suffer when they are not reaping the full rewards of their human capital.

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From a macroeconomic perspective, deskilling is a double jeopardy for countries of destination and origin. It represents a loss for destination countries as they are not fully utilizing the skills and talents of their skilled migrants. At the same time, there are also negative consequences for origin countries when they lose a significant number of their skilled workforce.

This analytical review revisits the phenomenon of migrant deskilling which persists in many countries of destination. In Part II, the motivations of the highly skilled for migrating are analyzed. This is to show that deskilling directly works against their main motivations and goals and negatively impacts on human development. In Part III, the reasons why deskilling occurs are discussed using two theoretical propositions. To show its particular impacts on migrants' welfare, some examples of deskilling experiences of various types of skilled migrants in different destination countries are discussed in Part IV. A summary of the paper and some policy recommendations are provided in Part V.

II. Why do highly skilled people migrate to other countries

It is seldom recognized that low-skilled and highly skilled migrants have different reasons for migrating. At the outset, their motives appear to be similar. They are both economic migrants that are induced by better remuneration and improved economic benefits in the destination countries. However, various studies that investigated why highly skilled people leave their origin countries reveal that they also value other things. Their knowledge and skills are their main resource and it is important for them that these are also properly used and harnessed overseas. They enter destination countries with the expectation that they will be able to use their education and training as well as gain new skills for professional development.

For instance, a qualitative study of Siar (2012) of Filipino expatriates in New Zealand and Australia revealed their motivations for migrating to these countries. The research participants—all of them highly skilled which included lawyers, medical doctors, academics, scientists in the physical and social sciences, and executives—indicated that although they appreciate the economic security that they enjoy in New Zealand or Australia, this has not been their sole motivation. Almost all of them mentioned professional and career advancement; better quality of life in terms of safety and security, social services, and work-life balance; and good opportunities for their family especially for the children as their main reasons for migrating. It is worth

mentioning that three of them were previously residing in the United States, one in Japan, and another in Belgium. Despite holding lucrative jobs in these countries, they opted to move to Oceania.

As a labour-exporting country whereby a significant component is nurse migration, the study of Lorenzo et al. (2007) is instructive.² The study was obtained from 48 focus groups of Filipino health workers, mostly women, some of whom also wish to leave the Philippines. Although the survey is focused on nurses' reasons, they are applicable to other occupations. The results indicated that Filipino nurses are not just motivated by economic incentives but also by factors that may facilitate their professional and personal development such as the opportunity to improve their nursing skills, experience advanced technology, and chance to travel and learn from other cultures (Lorenzo et al. 2007).

Table 1. Reasons for Filipino nurses going abroad

Push factors	Pull factors
Economic: low salary at home; no overtime or hazard pay; poor health insurance coverage	Economic: higher income; better benefits and compensation package
Job related: work overload or stressful working environment; slow promotion	Job related: lower nurse-to-patient ratio; chance to upgrade nursing skills
Sociopolitical and economic environment: limited opportunities; decreased health budget; sociopolitical and economic instability in the Philippines	Personal/family related: opportunity for family to migrate; opportunity to travel and learn other cultures; influence from peers and relatives
	Sociopolitical and economic environment: advanced technology; better sociopolitical and economic stability

Source: Lorenzo et al. (2007:1412)

Meanwhile, Astor et al. (2005) looked at the perceptions of different professionals in Colombia, Nigeria, India, Pakistan, and the Philippines regarding the reasons for physicians from developing countries migrating to developed countries. Because the professionals who

² Based on statistics from the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration, a total of 109,370 Filipinos left the country to work as professional nurses on temporary labour contracts from 2001 to 2010 (Philippine Overseas Employment Administration n.d.).

participated in the study were also working in the health field (as academics, policymakers or physicians), their responses are reflective of the actual motivations of the physicians who migrated abroad. The majority of the 644 respondents, a mix of men and women, expressed the belief that developed countries could better provide physicians a more suitable environment to utilize their highly specialized skills (Astor et al. 2005). The specific reasons gathered from the survey are given in Table 2.

While the majority of the respondents perceived that higher income is highly valued by physicians, a substantial percentage of them believe that physicians are also concerned with factors related to the practice and development of their profession and the opportunity to network with fellow professionals in their field.³ This is evident in the desire for “increased access to enhanced technology, equipment and health facilities” and “to work in an academic environment with more colleagues in one’s field of interest” (Astor et al. 2005:2494).

Table 2. Reasons for physician migration based on the views of professionals in Colombia, Nigeria, India, Pakistan and the Philippines (n=644)

Item	High significance (%)	Medium significance (%)	Low significance (%)	No response (%)
Desire for a higher income/more buying power	90.8	7.0	2.2	
Desire for a higher income relative to the incomes of other professionals	58.4	24.7	16.6	0.3
Desire for increased access to enhanced technology, equipment and health facilities for medical practice	74.1	18.3	7.6	
Desire to travel to a country with a higher number of medical jobs available	50.2	29.2	20.5	0.2
Desire to work in an academic	48.3	27.6	24.1	

³ Even professionals engaged in other occupations such as IT consider skills enhancement as an important motivation. In a survey of 45 skilled return IT professionals in Bangalore who worked on project assignments in the United States for a period of time, the majority said they availed of the opportunity to gain professional experience that they could later on use in India (Kadria 2004). For them, the technological edge of the United States in IT and the better professional experiences they could get there were important motivations for crossing the border.

environment with more colleagues in one's field of interest				
Desire for increased prestige associated with being a physician abroad	40.5	29.5	30.0	
Desire to live in a country with a higher level of general safety	51.9	22.7	25.5	
Desire to live in a country with increased economic stability	72.5	15.8	11.5	0.2
Desire for better prospect for one's children	78.0	14.0	7.8	0.3

Source: Astor et al. (2005:2494)

Apart from economic and professional factors, general safety and better prospects for one's children are highly desired factors by respondents in the same study. This may be linked to the fact that migrant professionals often bring their families with them when they move overseas so the welfare of their children, including their education, is a primary consideration.

Almost the same set of push and pull factors were given by health professionals in other countries. In a survey conducted by Ghana's Ministry of Health to establish trends and reasons for the loss of their doctors between 1969 and 1999, the most common reasons obtained include the search for better remuneration and conditions of service, better postgraduate training opportunities, and the desire to afford basic life amenities (Dovlo and Nyonator 1999). There was also expressed frustration over delayed promotion and the rigid system of seniority.

A more diverse study of professionals working in various sectors such as finance, health, biotechnology, and information technology conducted by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) in the UK confirmed the fact that highly skilled migrants are drawn to work overseas for reasons other than better pay. The participants originated from a mix of source countries or regions that were classified into seven groups (USA, Australia/Canada, New Zealand, Far East [Japan, Malaysia, China, Singapore, Korea], India/Pakistan, Eastern Europe, and South Africa). Asked why they decided to work in another country, the majority of the professionals in the sample gave as reasons their desire to gain experience/knowledge/exposure, develop their careers, and take advantage of better opportunities (DTI-UK 2002). Financial reason was also

mentioned but was only the fourth most commonly mentioned. Asked to rate a set of factors that motivated them to work in the UK, the five factors that got the highest ratings were the personal challenge of working and living in another culture, gaining of additional knowledge in another country, the opportunity to work at the “leading edge of your specialisation or profession”, learning other cultures, and more challenging work.

These studies clearly show that while wages are an important factor affecting the decision of highly skilled people to move abroad, it is not always the most important factor. Evidence of this is also shown in a study of Vujicic et al. (2004) on the effect of wage differentials between a source country and a receiving country on the migration decisions of health professionals. Data were obtained from a synthesis report on the migration of health professionals in six African countries (Cameroon, Ghana, Senegal, South Africa, Uganda, Zimbabwe) published in 2003 by the World Health Organization Regional Office for Africa. A striking result is that while South Africa is much better off than the other African countries in the sample in terms of wages relative to the destination countries (United States, Canada, United Kingdom, Australia), the percentage of health professionals in South Africa who still wish to migrate is close to that of Ghana where the wage differential is much higher. The reason has not been well explored by the authors but it may be connected to safety and security issues in South Africa particularly for the White South Africans after the end of the apartheid in the 1990s. The study also shows violence and crime to be the second most-cited reason of South African health professionals for wanting to leave their home country, and this may be related to South Africa’s social and political climate in the post-apartheid years and how it has impacted White South Africans.

II. Why deskilling exists and persists: some conceptual views

In some ways, the dual labor market theory proposed by American economist Michael Piore in his 1979 seminal publication *Birds of Passage* explains how and why deskilling occurs. In Piore’s view, the economy is composed of a capital-intensive primary market—which is reserved for natives—and a labor-intensive secondary market. Higher skilled and thus higher paying and higher status jobs characterize the primary market while lower skilled and lower paying jobs, which native workers shun away from due to lower wages and lower status, make up the secondary market (Piore 1979). Economic expansion results in the demand for more labor, which

is initially satisfied by the native labor force. Labor shortages occur in the secondary market because they prefer to work in the primary market. Firms therefore rely on migrant labor to fill the secondary market.

If migrants are willing to take on lower skilled and lower paying jobs even if they are higher skilled, Piore's view is that they perceive their state as only temporary. They see themselves returning home eventually after they have achieved their purpose, such as saving for the future, paying off a debt, or sending their children to school. A problem arises, according to Piore, when they do not remain temporary and when they take their family members to live with them. Seeing the host country as their new home, they aspire for economic advancement and this means competing for jobs in the primary market. As they gain skills and education in the host country or as their children mature and become educated, they also come into competition with native workers for opportunities. This creates a vacuum in the secondary market and as this cycle is repeated, it leads to a continued reliance on migrant workers for steady supply of cheap labor.

As implied in this model, deskilling happens because there is a secondary market of lower paying and lower status jobs which migrants are willing to accept. Alternatively, the situation may be viewed the other way around. Migrants feed this secondary market and this market persists because of the presence of cheap migrant labor. The model also treats deskilling as a rational and conscious decision taken by migrants to enter the overseas labor market. In the same vein, the model sees employing cheap migrants as a rational decision taken by employers to minimize their costs. Rather than raising wages in the secondary market to entice native workers to take these jobs, firms are able to keep wages low by using the steady supply of migrant workers that are willing to fill the labor scarcities in the secondary market.

A careful scrutiny may suggest that although there are traces of truth in this model, its simplicity renders it ineffective in understanding the phenomenon of deskilling beyond the economic lens. Piore's assumption of migrant workers being of temporary status (or what are commonly known as contractual or seasonal workers) also restricts the application of the model to other types of migrants. In many immigration countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, economic migrants are not just temporary workers; many of them become permanent settlers.

An alternative view is offered by Harald Bauder. Looking beyond economics and binaries, Bauder puts forward the theory that deskilling—or what he also terms as ‘job devaluation’—as a strategy of host countries to preserve the social order. Bauder perceives the labor market as a site of class reproduction, with the host country doing its best to maintain the superiority of the native population by reserving the best jobs to them. He regards deskilling as an institutionalized form of marginalization of migrants intended to maintain the existing power structure.

Expounding his views in *Labor movement: how migration regulates labor markets* (Bauder 2006), Bauder explains that the boundaries imposed by host countries on who should have access to opportunities particularly the jobs in the upper echelons, and who should be denied access to, is a means to reproduce the existing structure of society.

In framing his insights of immigrant labor segmentation, Bauder takes on Pierre Bordieu’s concept of capital and the idea of equating capital to all forms of power, from which individuals and groups draw upon a variety of resources to maintain or enhance their position in the social order (Swartz 1997). In particular, Bauder applies the concept of cultural capital by focusing on how it works in the social reproduction within a society composed of native and migrant workers. Cultural capital encompasses resources including such things as verbal facility, general cultural awareness, aesthetic preferences, information about the school system, and educational credentials (Swartz 1997). Cultural capital, according to Bordieu, exists in three different states: embodied (such as music and works of arts, which can be ‘consumed’ only by apprehending their meaning), objectified (or symbols of material status such as fashion and art), and institutionalized (such as diplomas, certificates and degrees or those that are acquired through the institutional credential system). For Bordieu, culture itself is a capital and because capital is power, then culture can be a source of power.

In the case of highly skilled migrants, their institutionalized cultural capital (educational degree and training) is a source of power for entering an immigration country like Australia or New Zealand which has a preference for skilled professionals. The human capital theory has emphasized how investments in education could lead to increased personal well-being (Becker 1993), hence, ideally, a skilled migrant’s educational qualification and training should be able to place him or her in equal footing with others, including native workers, who possess similar qualities in terms of education and training, regardless of gender, race, and ethnicity. The

deskilling phenomenon negates this human capital assumption with the devaluation of a skilled migrant's cultural capital in the host country. Bourdieu explained this capital devaluation through his concept of 'habitus' which can be understood as a "structured framework of evaluations and expectations which lead to the conscious or intuitive prioritising of certain dispositions and practices" and which "provides the context in which capitals of various forms (economic, social, cultural) are valued and given meaning" (Kelly and Lusis 2006:833). The concept of habitus indicates that the valorization of capital is socially created and not determined by objective structures. Taking this concept further to expound on his idea of the labor market as a site of class reproduction, Bauder (2006:38) explains that "the valorization, devaluation or creation of forms of capital is a place-particular process controlled by social groups, institutions and individual pursuing the aim of distinguishing themselves from others." In other words, the value of a capital is specific to a place.

One obvious way of devaluing the cultural capital of migrants is by not recognizing foreign credentials and requiring migrants to undergo training or to pass an examination before they can apply for a job. Bauder explains that professional associations, state regulators, and licensing bodies all act in the interest of host countries by deliberately defining entry requirements in a way that native-born workers will remain in the upper status. The medical profession has one of the toughest standards. Other highly restricted occupations include law and teaching. In New Zealand, overseas-trained nurses are normally required by the Nursing Council of New Zealand to undertake a sixth- to eight-month competency assessment programme (better known as 'bridging' program) (Nursing Council of New Zealand n.d.). They must successfully pass this program (which costs around NZ\$4,000) to be registered with the Nursing Council and be given a practicing certificate which is their passport to finding work in New Zealand. In the United Kingdom, overseas-trained teachers need to gain a qualified teacher status (QTS) to teach in state-maintained schools (<http://www.tda.gov.uk>). This can be obtained by undergoing initial teacher training to enable them to meet the professional standards for QTS. However, access to a program for QTS is not automatic as their degree qualifications must be considered comparable by UK Naric, the government agency which provides advice on the comparability between international qualifications and UK qualifications (Miller 2008).

Another way is putting a premium on local experience over the migrant worker's skills and competencies. In many ways, local experience does not equate to the person's skill set but his or her knowledge of the local setting, including its culture, as well as the system of the host country, which the person could gain by being employed locally. Looking at the actual scenario where new immigrants often face severe hardships of getting even a first job for lack of local experience, this can be considered a nonsensical requirement. How can a new migrant acquire local experience when no employer wants to employ him/her in the first place?

III. Some deskilling examples: the hard life that skilled migrants face

There is a broad literature on immigrant economic integration in different destination countries. Many of these studies have analyzed the employment outcomes and labor participation of overseas-educated and trained migrants in the traditional immigration countries. As can be gleaned in some deskilling examples given below, deskilling is a complex process that demonstrates the interplay of race, ethnicity, and gender in the labor market participation of skilled migrants.

One of the most critical impacts of deskilling is the difficulty of finding work in the destination countries. For example, Henderson et al. (2001) noted the difficult experience of 36 highly skilled Chinese migrants in finding employment in New Zealand. These respondents reported the nonrecognition of their overseas qualifications, particularly for the doctors, teachers, and engineers in the sample. The statutory registration for obtaining a practising certificate, while a procedure accepted by these migrants, was considered by them as a major setback given the time-consuming process filled with heavy requirements that may require months up to a year or years to fulfil. Some participants also reported lack of New Zealand qualifications and work experience as reasons for their inability to find work. The women engineers in the sample also felt they were being discriminated against because of their gender. Finally, respondents reported their lack of familiarity with New Zealand English, particularly its accent, speed, and colloquialism, as a factor that contributed to their unemployment.

In the Longitudinal Immigration Surveys of Migrant Experiences in New Zealand (New Zealand Department of Labour 2004) conducted in 2001 and 2002, the same barriers to finding work in New Zealand were mentioned by the respondents who were out of work at the time of the survey

(Table 1). Respondents in the 2007 Settlement Experience of Skilled Migrants Survey (Badkar 2008) also confirmed the same difficulties faced by the migrants (both principal and secondary applicants) in finding work in New Zealand. From a sample of 150 respondents, more than 50 percent cited lack of New Zealand experience, 35 percent gave language difficulties, and 28 percent noted the nonacceptance of their skills or prior experience by New Zealand employers as the common barriers they experienced in finding a job. The feeling of job dissatisfaction among employed migrants was also a critical issue raised in the same study. The common reasons found were low pay, the inability to use their skills and experience, and their job being not their preference.

Table 1. Main difficulties with finding employment (Wave 1 of the Longitudinal Survey)

W1 Main difficulties with finding employment ^{1, 2}	Total %
My skills or experience are not accepted by NZ employers	41
Not enough suitable work for someone with my skills or experience	30
Don't have enough skills or experience for the jobs that are available	25
I have difficulties with English language	24
I have experienced discrimination because I am a migrant	23
There are no jobs available in the area that I live	19
I do not have family or friends in NZ who can help me get a job	14
Experienced discrimination because of my age gender, religion etc.	13
Other	28
Total weighted number	384
Total unweighted number	63

Source: New Zealand Department of Labour (2004, p. 86), Table 6.25.

Central to the deskilling literature are studies on the catch-up of migrants or their gaining parity in the labor market over time. The earning gap of migrants and native workers and the theory of narrowing of this gap with assimilation in the host country have been analyzed by many scholars (see, for example, Borjas 1985, 1995; Li 2000, 2003; Reitz 2003; Card 2005; Picott and Sweetman 2005). While these studies agree that immigrants earn less at entry, they have different conclusions about the prospects for immigrant assimilation and catch-up. At the heart of these opposing views is the position of Borjas who extensively studied the case of immigrants in the US particularly those who arrived in the 1970s and succeeding periods. Large migration

streams into the US occurred in the 1970s and 1980s as a result of the passage of the Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965 (Pandey et al. 2006). Borjas (1995:238-239) argued that “there is little evidence to suggest that immigrants reach wage-parity with the typical US-born worker during their working lives...it is likely that the relative wages of post-1970 immigrants will remain about 15-20 percentage points below those of natives throughout much of their working lives.” This challenges the seminal view of Chiswick who proclaimed less than two decades earlier that after 10 to 15 years in the US, immigrants’ earnings equal and even exceed those of the native born (Chiswick 1978). Contrary to Borjas, the conclusions of David Card were more optimistic. Card (2005) agreed with Borjas and other scholars on the lower earnings of migrants relative to the native born, but argued that this is compensated by the wage advantage enjoyed by second-generation children as a result of their higher educational levels. These diverging positions signify that migrant assimilation and integration will remain important issues for policy work and future research.

Meanwhile, the work of Picott and Sweetman (2005) on Canadian immigrants shows that income change was questionable especially for migrants who arrived in the 1990s and later. In their analysis, this affects immigrants in all education groups, age groups, and most source countries, except the traditional sources. Some factors responsible for this include: (1) the changing composition of source countries. Between 1981 and 2001, the majority of immigrants entering Canada were from Eastern Europe, South Asia, East Asia, Western Asia, and Africa, regions where the human capital is less transferable due to issues of language, cultural differences, education, credentials, and discrimination; (2) foreign work experience is significantly discounted in the Canadian labor market; and (3) the increasing number of highly educated Canadian-born.

On the other hand, the racialized and gendered nature of migration was revisited by Creese and Wiebe (2009) through an indepth study in Canada of the downward mobility of skilled migrants from sub-Saharan Africa. The findings of this qualitative study are useful as the voices of the deskilled migrants show the real picture, of how they resort to working in survival jobs or doing survival employment, how they are discriminated against on the basis of their English accent and color, and how their education is devalued. These are realities that are often masked or underplayed in quantitative studies. Creese and Wiebe found that deskilling has different effects

for men and women because the labor market in Canada is not only racialized but also gendered. While it affects men greatly, the effect in men is less severe than in women because men have more access to blue collar jobs while women do not. The lower rungs of jobs in the retail or service sector are also mostly reserved for the less-educated females of the domestic labor market so women migrants are left to do cleaning work and some light manufacturing work. In the long run, however, there is a higher percentage of female migrants than male migrants who are able to work in semiprofessional fields and later on eventually gain access to white collar jobs. Given their constraints, women are forced to invest more into continuing education and gaining host-country credentials. Meanwhile, fewer men pursue further education because they had more access to the labor market—at least for survival employment. The time and expense of doing retraining is also more prohibitive for men. As a result, skilled male immigrants find themselves trapped in manual labor or survival employment in the long run.

The effect of race and ethnicity is also shown in a study of Boyd and Thomas (2002) which looked at the employment outcomes of male engineer migrants in Canada. The results show that they are less likely to be employed in engineering occupations except for those born in the United Kingdom, Western Europe, and the Oceanic countries. The Canadian-born and the foreign-born arriving in Canada as children and therefore educated or trained in Canadian institutions are most likely to be employed in engineering and/or managerial occupations. Migrant engineers who migrated after age 27 and those who are born in the Philippines or Eastern Europe have the lowest probability of holding a managerial or engineering occupation. The authors attribute these outcomes to human capital differences arising from perceived differences in educational systems and language skills. Employment disparities tend to diminish as length of stay in Canada increases (15 years or more) and for those who have master's or PhD degrees.

Beginning in the 1970s, the UK has gradually liberalized its policies concerning the admission of immigrants, favoring those with high educational skills and resources rather than selecting purely on the basis of racial backgrounds. The selection of the highly skilled has intensified in the 1990s, with preference for nurses, medical doctors, engineers, and teachers due to the shortage of these skills in the domestic labor market. Overseas-trained teachers (OTTs) come mostly from European countries, the United States, and Canada, as well as from Asia, Africa, and the

Caribbean. However, a study by Miller (2008) revealed the downward professional mobility experienced by OTTs in the UK. Analyzing the 2004 Labour Force Survey, Miller (2008) found higher unemployment rates among the non-UK born and educated migrants. This is highly attributed to the nonrecognition or devaluation of their overseas qualifications. Migrants from white ethnic backgrounds were also found to be performing better in terms of employment and wage levels which also suggests the effect of race and ethnicity.

With its ageing population, Australia has opened its doors to more health professionals from non-traditional source countries in recent years. In one of the early studies of migrant deskilling in Australia, Hawthorne (2001) looked at the employment outcomes of overseas-trained nurses. The sample consisted of 719 overseas-qualified registered nurses (93% females) and who had settled in Australia between 1980 and 1996. While she did not find any significant association between holding a position of responsibility (e.g., nurse director, nurse supervisor, nurse manager) and variables such as gender, whether a nurse had children or not, age or visa status, it was significant with region of origin. Specifically, non-Commonwealth Asians were significantly disadvantaged. They were found to be 70 percent less likely to be appointed to positions of responsibility when compared to English-speaking background (ESB) nurses or those from the UK, US, Canada, South Africa, Ireland, and New Zealand. Non-Commonwealth Asian nurses were also found to be more likely to work in public hospitals and in nursing homes, a sector which is increasingly identified as for foreign labour.

Conclusion and some policy recommendations

Deskilling of migrant labor is a continuing phenomenon in many immigration countries. It may be viewed in several ways: as a host country's way of filling up labor scarcities in the secondary market by exploiting cheap enclave labor, as a transitional phase for migrants to adjust to the 'standards' of the host country, or as a form of institutionalized discrimination. Of these three views, the last can be considered the most critical from a human rights perspective. Host countries may deny that it is a form of racism or discrimination, but empirical evidence is clearly pointing to that direction.

For instance, in New Zealand, some migration experts view that the government's immigration policy is itself racially prejudiced, with the changes implemented, particularly the admission of

the erstwhile ‘undesirables’, a mere front to hide the discriminatory attitude of the ‘White’ society. As Ip and Friesen (2001, p.234) noted: “Despite being touted as non-racial, the government’s immigration policy itself can be viewed as a form of institutional racism. In particular, the lack of support offered to new migrants has been an issue, especially for those whose first language was not English and who were sold an idealised version of the real New Zealand.”

But whatever point of view is taken, it is clear that deskilling is a damaging practice. It causes unnecessary burden to migrants, which undoubtedly adds stress to their adjustment and settlement in the host country.

From a macroeconomic perspective, deskilling is a double jeopardy for countries of destination and origin. It represents a loss for destination countries as they are not fully utilizing the skills and talents of their skilled migrants. At the same time, there are also negative consequences for origin countries when they lose a significant number of their skilled workforce.

There are some ways by which both countries of origin and destination can help to mitigate the negative impacts of deskilling.

First, origin countries should endeavor to improve the quality of information given to their departing migrants to prepare them for the challenges ahead, more specifically with respect to labor market integration issues. To facilitate successful integration, it is imperative to prepare the migrants while they are still in their home countries so they can anticipate the challenges and plan on how to address them. Departing migrants, as well as those who are contemplating to migrate, are not usually given an honest picture of the difficulties they will face in the destination countries by their immigration agents who expectedly would not divulge unfavorable stories. But even if information is available, many a times, they also just ignore it as their perspective is clouded with so much hope for a better life abroad due to depictions of positive images of migration in the media. Home countries, particularly their governments, have a responsibility to inform and educate their citizens.

In the case of the Philippines, the government through the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO) performs this task through the conduct of country-specific pre-departure orientation

seminars which are compulsory for all departing permanent migrants. Meanwhile, the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration provides seminars for those who are leaving the country on labor contracts. Topics usually covered include travel regulations, immigration procedures, cultural differences, settlement concerns, employment and social security concerns, and rights and obligations of Filipino migrants. But even if these programs exist, there is a need to continuously improve the quality of these seminars and ensure that they do reflect the real issues that migrants will face overseas and to suggest strategies on how these can be addressed. Notably, the CFO has been exerting efforts to improve the quality of their PDOS. One of its strategies to keep their PDOS updated and relevant is by coordinating with diaspora organizations in the host countries.

Second, there is a need for destination countries to look beyond statistics and evaluation reports proclaiming the success of migration policies and settlement programs and make a more in-depth investigation of the actual situation of migrants. For example, a recent major government report prepared by Hawthorne (2011) indicates that the two-step migration model adopted by New Zealand and Australia, whether it is the work-to-residence pathway or the study-migration pathway, has been successful, judging from the labor market outcomes of new migrants. Using longitudinal survey data and comparing the results in the two countries for the period 2005-2006 with a sample of 10,000 migrants in Australia and 12,202 migrants in New Zealand, the study found a high percentage of skilled principal applicants in both countries in paid employment at 18 months post-migration (85% in Australia and 87% in New Zealand). It also showed that only 18 percent of skilled principal applicants to Australia experienced unemployment at 18 months post-migration, with the figure for New Zealand significantly lower at seven percent. While evaluation reports such as these are useful to gauge success, positive outcomes tend to dissuade policymakers from looking deeper into the situation on the ground. The fact remains that the devaluation of skilled migrants' human capital is a continuing phenomenon.

And third, there is a need to bring the discourse of deskilling into the immigration and labor policy spectrum. Educating departing migrants in their origin countries and improving settlement services in the destination countries are useful strategies. However, these are not enough. Deskilling clearly demonstrates a mismatch between immigration laws and labor practices of destination countries. With skilled migration, destination countries gain from the entry of skilled

professionals and therefore should provide a suitable environment for them to achieve professional and economic stability with less difficulty. They should ease the uptake of migrant labor through better labor policies and suitable settlement strategies for their migrants. This can result in having productive and content skilled migrants that are appreciative of their host country and eager to contribute to its development. Deskilling, if allowed to persist, will be detrimental to destination countries in the long run. Migrants, particularly the skilled, are mobile. People with high level of education and skills and who are well off can readily move to other countries. With more countries relaxing their immigration policies, and many transnational companies ready to provide attractive compensation packages to lure foreign talents, the options for the 'best and the brightest' are expanding more than ever.

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