

An Analysis of the Performance of Filipino EPA Nurses in the Practice National Board Examination of Japan Conducted in English

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Abstract

Japan has been receiving Filipino nurses under the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) since 2009. Under the agreement, they must pass the National Board Examination (NBE)—conducted in the Japanese language—so that they can continue working (as fully fledged nurses) in Japan. It is a challenging requirement for foreign nurses. Indeed, the passing rate in the NBEs turned out to be considerably low (approximately 10 percent). It is essential for both Philippine and Japanese stakeholders to identify the factors contributing thereto. In this light, this article presents the result of the study that observes the distribution of the accuracy rate of Filipino EPA nurses who entered Japan in 2009 in a practice exam of the NBE, which comprised 240 questions. The performance of Japanese examinees in the actual NBE for nurses in 2009 conducted in Japanese was referred to as a benchmark. Among the eleven officially designated categories of nursing, including seven categories from clinical nursing and four categories from the basics of nursing sciences, the average score in each category in clinical nursing ranged from 60.2 percent to 73.2 percent. For the basics of nursing sciences, it was from 55.3 percent to 78.9 percent. Among the Filipino examinees, there was a huge gap in accuracy rate between those who had seen the questions of NBE for nurses of any of the previous years on the one hand, and those who had never seen them on the other. While 57.1 percent of those who had

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previously seen the exam questions could satisfy the passing rate, only 23.7 percent of those who had never seen them could do that. The study also shows that Filipino nurses in average marked higher points in questions on the knowledge on pharmacology and physiology than their Japanese counterparts, while they marked in average lower points in gerontology nursing than their Japanese peers. From the practice examination result, it is suggested that the obstacles facing the Filipino EPA nurse in passing the National Board Examination concern not only Japanese language proficiency but also differences in examination style, nursing education curriculum, and basic nursing policies in the Philippines and Japan.

Keywords: Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA), foreign nurse, practice national board examination in English

Introduction

In the late 2000s, Japan began to receive foreign nurses from Asian countries under bilateral Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). In 2008, the first batch of Indonesian nurses entered Japan under the Japan–Indonesia Economic Partnership Agreement (JIEPA). In 2009, they were followed by their Filipino counterparts under the Japan–Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA). In 2014, Vietnam started to send nurses to Japan under the Japan–Vietnam Economic Partnership Agreement (JVEPA).

Such movement of nurses is covered in the provisions on the movement of natural persons (MNP) of each EPA. Although the basic scheme of these MNPs is common among these EPAs, the details for each differ. For instance, Indonesian and Filipino nurses must acquire at least the N5 level in the Japanese Language Proficiency Test (JLPT) after six months of predeparture study in their respective countries before they can enter Japan.¹ JVEPA requires Vietnamese nurses the JLPT N3 certificate, in addition to twelve months of predeparture Japanese language training in Vietnam. Required qualifications for application to the EPAs vary with each sending country, too. Indonesian nurses are required to have at least two years of clinical work experience, Filipino nurses at least three years,² and Vietnamese nurses at least two years.