

## **Do Temporary Skilled Migrants In The Healthcare Sector, Specifically The Nursing Profession, Have Agency Over Their Migration Experience?**

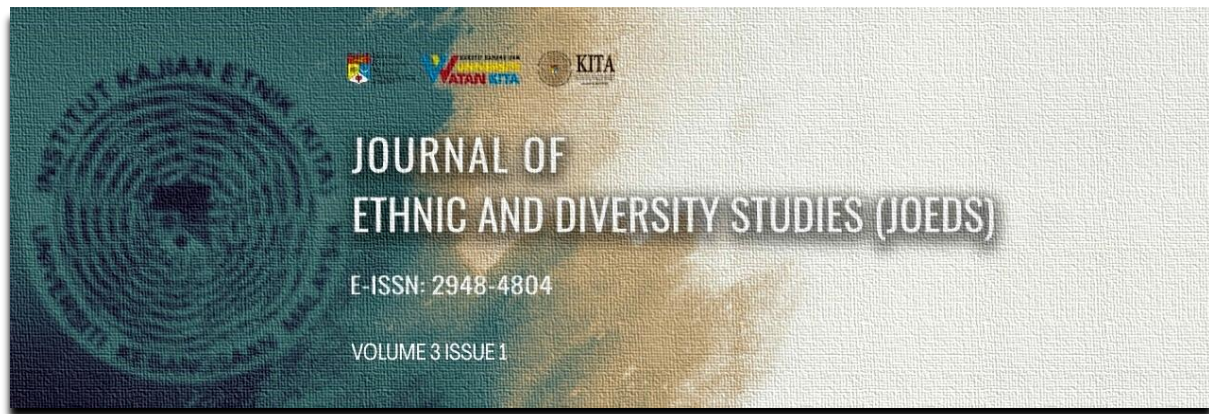
*(Adakah Migran Mahir Sementara Dalam Sektor Penjagaan Kesihatan, Khususnya Profesion Kejururawatan, Mempunyai Agensi Terhadap Pengalaman Migrasi Mereka?)*

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study addresses gaps in existing literature concerning temporary skilled migrants (TSMs) in the Australian healthcare sector and nursing profession, particularly those holding the Temporary Work (Skilled) visas (subclass 457) [457] or Temporary Skills Shortage visas (subclass 482) [TSS]. The study considers TSMs' level of agency in shaping their migration experiences. While prior research has explored the economic and political aspects of skilled migration, a comprehensive study of TSMs' varied experiences and agency is still needed. The focus on healthcare stems from it being one of Australia's top three most sought-after skilled industries (Kelly, 2019). The aim of this study was to investigate the agency experienced by these migrants in influencing their life trajectories and contributing to Australian migration policy. The qualitative study highlighted the key role of TSM perspectives in shaping Australia's migration policy. It included a focus group with six stakeholders from various professions related to TSMs, and interviews with eight TSMs on or formerly on the 457 or TSS visa. The findings highlight the lack of agency in TSMs' migration journeys and the absence of their lived experiences in policy processes. The study offers recommendations to enhance TSM participation in policymaking, improving migration outcomes and their agency.*

**Keywords:** Agency, Globalisation, Government, Healthcare sector, Labour market



## ABSTRAK

*Kajian ini menangani jurang dalam kesusasteraan sedia ada mengenai pendatang mahir sementara (TSM) dalam sektor penjagaan kesihatan Australia dan profesion kejururawatan, terutamanya mereka yang memegang visa Kerja Sementara (Mahir) (subkelas 457) [457] atau visa Kekurangan Kemahiran Sementara (subkelas 482) [TSS]. Kajian ini mempertimbangkan tahap agensi TSM dalam membentuk pengalaman penghijrahan mereka. Walaupun penyelidikan terdahulu telah meneroka aspek ekonomi dan politik penghijrahan mahir, kajian komprehensif tentang pelbagai pengalaman dan agensi TSM masih diperlukan. Tumpuan pada penjagaan kesihatan berpunca daripada ia menjadi salah satu daripada tiga industri mahir yang paling dicari di Australia (Kelly, 2019). Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk menyiasat agensi yang dialami oleh pendatang ini dalam mempengaruhi trajektori hidup mereka dan menyumbang kepada dasar migrasi Australia. Kajian kualitatif itu menyerlahkan peranan utama perspektif TSM dalam membentuk dasar penghijrahan Australia. Ia termasuk kumpulan fokus dengan enam pihak berkepentingan daripada pelbagai profesion yang berkaitan dengan TSM, dan temu bual dengan lapan TSM pada atau sebelum ini menggunakan visa 457 atau TSS. Penemuan itu menyerlahkan kekurangan agensi dalam perjalanan penghijrahan TSM dan ketiadaan pengalaman hidup mereka dalam proses dasar. Kajian ini menawarkan cadangan untuk meningkatkan penyertaan TSM dalam penggubalan dasar, meningkatkan hasil penghijrahan dan agensi mereka.*

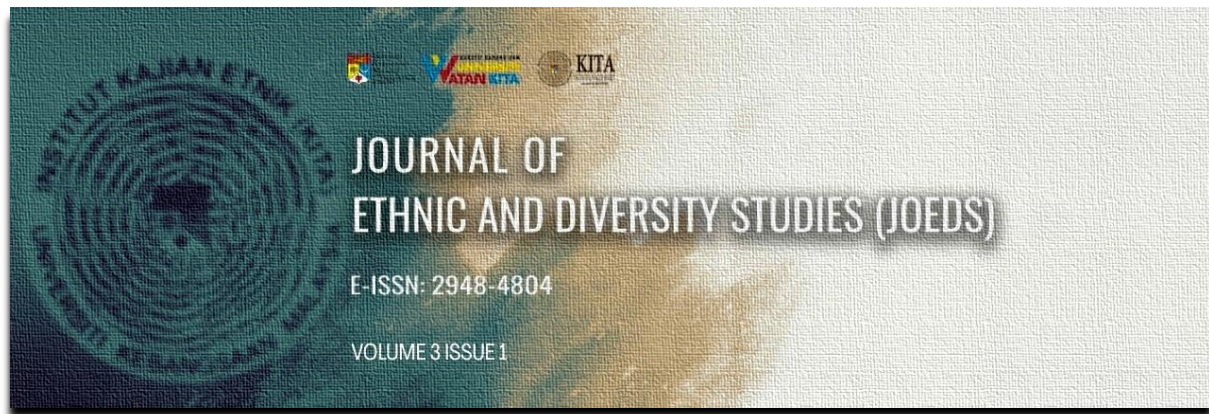
*Kata kunci: Agensi, Globalisasi, Kerajaan, Sektor penjagaan kesihatan, Pasaran buruh*

## INTRODUCTION

Previous studies have delved into the advantages and drawbacks of temporary skilled migration in host nations (Pietsche, 2022). However, a significant gap exists concerning the agency of TSMs during their migration process. This gap is particularly evident among TSMs in Australia on the previous 457 or the TSS Visas, especially those in the nursing profession. The lived experiences of these individuals hold valuable insights that can inform and potentially reshape policymaking for Australia's temporary migration program. This study aims to fill this gap by examining the first-hand lived experiences of TSMs within Australia's healthcare sector, focusing on those in the nursing profession.

Australia's migration context, shaped by economic needs and historical debates, outlines the significant and dynamic nature of skilled migration within the policy landscape (Doherty & Evershed, 2018). Historically, the transition from permanent family migration to temporary skilled migration has reflected the government's strategic aims and preferences to boost the economy (Betts, 1993b). Factors such as job security, cultural assimilation, acculturation, and the changing





political climate have dictated Australia's migration history for decades (Collins, 1986; Legrain, 2007b).

The study considers the evolving nature of migration policies, particularly the shift from the 457 Visa to the TSS Visa over time. Despite these policy changes, there remains a lack of consideration for TSM involvement and feedback in the development of migration policies. This study seeks to amplify the voices of TSMs, providing crucial insights to inform policy debates and decisions.

The study specifically aims to understand TSMs' lived experiences in the nursing profession, the contextual factors impacting them, and their agency within Australian life and policy processes. The research includes current and former visa holders, employers of TSMs, advocates, and key informants. The healthcare sector's significance is highlighted, especially given its forecasted growth and increasing demand, particularly in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic.

By incorporating the lived experiences of TSMs, the study contributes to existing knowledge gaps and informed policymaking. It outlines the benefits of considering these experiences, including enhanced policy relevance, improved policy effectiveness, tailored support options, better social integration, and more effective talent attraction.

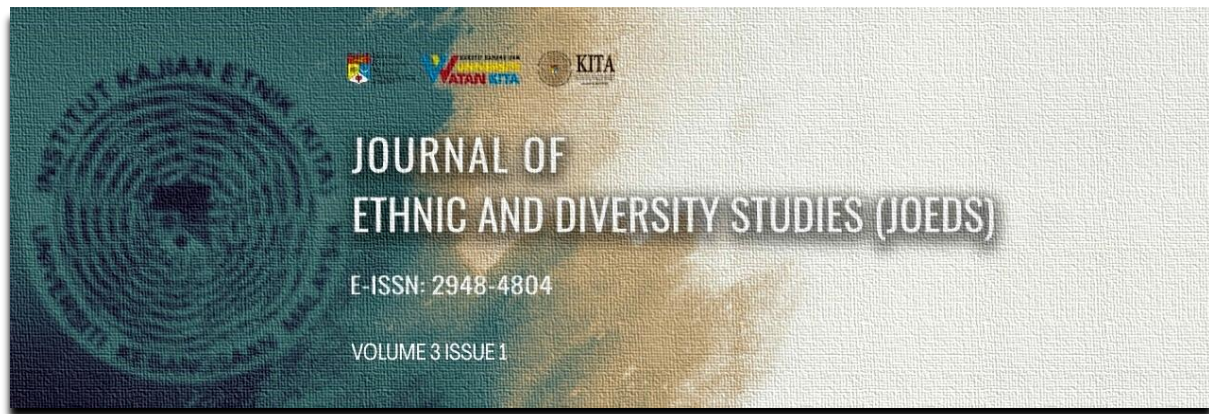
The structure of the study encompasses historical and theoretical context, detailed methodologies, research findings, and in-depth discussions. The study concludes by emphasising the importance of incorporating TSMs' voices in shaping migration policies and fostering a culture of tolerance and inclusivity in Australia.

The research highlights the crucial role of TSMs in the Australian workforce, particularly in sectors like healthcare that are critical to national well-being. By bringing to light the personal narratives and professional challenges faced by TSM nurses, the study advocates for a more inclusive and participatory approach to policy formulation. This approach not only recognises the contributions of TSMs but also seeks to create a more supportive and integrative environment for them.

In summary, this study aims to bridge the gap in understanding the agency of TSMs in Australia, focusing on their lived experiences in the nursing profession. Through a comprehensive analysis of migration policies and the personal experiences of TSMs, the study provides valuable insights that can help shape more effective and inclusive migration policies in Australia.

### *LITERATURE REVIEW*

Migration is a complex phenomenon involving multiple stages, challenges, and perspectives. Existing research explores pre-migration preparation, settlement struggles, workplace cultural competency, policy frameworks, and migration theories in abundance. However, there is a significant gap in understanding the agency (or lack thereof) of TSMs in Australia's healthcare sector.



Literature outlines that in more recent times, during the pre-migration phase, digital platforms play a crucial role in information access, reflecting the impact of globalisation (Appadurai, 1996). Despite abundant online resources, migrants often encounter inadequate guidance, complicating their transition in the host country (Stark & Bloom, 1985). Upon arrival, they face social isolation, employment restrictions, and professional accreditation challenges (Gunasekara, Grant & Rajendran, 2019). However, research seldom examines how TSMs in the healthcare sector exercise agency to overcome these barriers.

Cultural competency frameworks are essential for workplace inclusion particularly for TSMs from non-English speaking countries (FECCA, 2019), yet discrimination and underutilisation of migrant skills persist. While literature highlights systemic barriers, few studies explore how TSMs actively navigate workplace challenges and career progression. Similarly, migration policies shape employment conditions and access to opportunities (Bolger, 2019), but little is known about how healthcare sector TSMs negotiate these constraints.

Migration theories abundantly explain mobility drivers, including economic and environmental factors (Van Hear et al., 2008), yet they often overlook the agency of TSMs in shaping their professional trajectories. Likewise, while social capital is crucial for settlement (Wali & Renzaho, 2018), research rarely considers how health sector TSMs leverage networks for career advancement. Poststructuralist perspectives challenge rigid migration narratives (Harcourt, 2007; Darkins, 2017) but rarely address professional autonomy in this sector specifically.

This existing literature highlights a critical gap: the lack of research on TSMs' agency in Australia's healthcare sector. Future studies should examine how these migrants navigate systemic barriers, assert professional autonomy, and influence their settlement experiences.

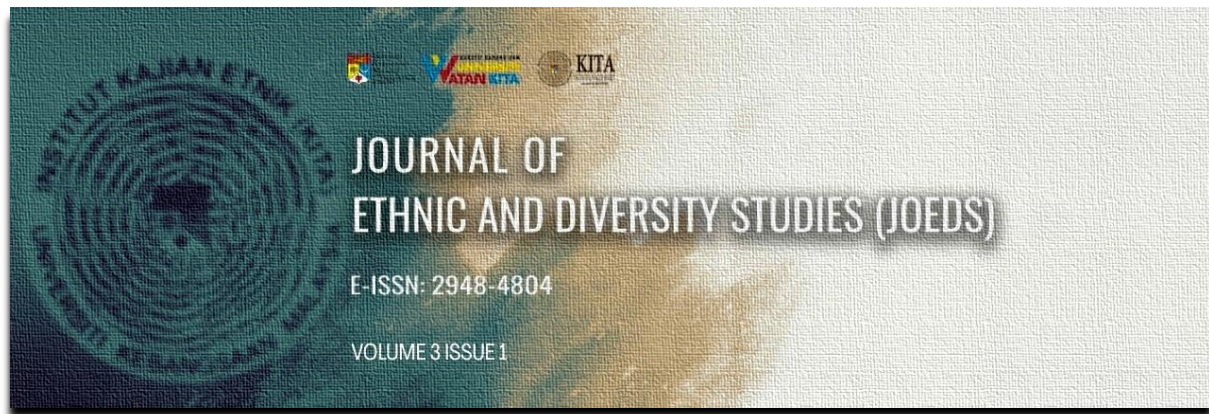
### **METHODOLOGY**

By establishing epistemological frameworks and employing qualitative research methods, this segment paves the way for a comprehensive exploration of TSMs' lived experiences.

Epistemology, defined as the study of knowledge, forms the theoretical foundation of the research study (Dooley, 1990). Constructivism and phenomenology emerge as the guiding epistemological approaches. Constructivism posits that reality is constructed through human interaction and experience (McKinley, 2015), while phenomenology seeks to uncover and analyse the meanings embedded within individual lived experiences (Creswell, 2007). These epistemological orientations shape the research design, enabling a nuanced exploration of TSMs' subjective realities.

By focusing on the lived experiences of culturally diverse TSMs, phenomenology facilitates a culturally sensitive understanding of how social factors influence their perceptions (Creswell, 2007). Through reflexivity and openness to multiplicity, phenomenology enables researchers to authentically capture the richness of TSMs' narratives, thus contributing to a more





inclusive representation of human experiences (Van Manen & Adams, 2009).

The study adopts a qualitative research approach, consisting of narrative and interpretive aspects to uncover the complexities of social phenomena (Creswell, 2007). Employing techniques such as interviews, focus groups, and policy process analysis, the study captures the complex nature of TSMs' experiences in the healthcare sector. The study ensures a comprehensive exploration of relevant themes and issues by conducting a thorough literature review (Bowen, 2009) and employing purposive sampling techniques (Etikan, Musa & Alkassim, 2016).

Through interviews with various stakeholders, including TSMs, advocates, policymakers, and healthcare workers, the study explores the lived experiences of TSMs, contextual factors influencing their experiences, their ability to participate in Australian life, how they are perceived, and their potential contribution to shaping migration policy. The research employs content analysis (Walter, 2013), thematic analysis (Walter, 2013), and coding techniques (Bright & Connor, 2017) to analyse interview data rigorously, aiming to uncover underlying themes and patterns. By adhering to grounded theory methodology, the study ensures consistency in data analysis and interpretation. Through its findings, the study shed light on the challenges faced by TSMs and their potential role in shaping migration policy, providing valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders to improve the skilled migration program in Australia.

Ethical considerations are paramount throughout the research process, with measures in place to protect participants' confidentiality and ensure informed consent (Bryman & Bell, 2007). By adhering to rigorous methodological standards and ethical guidelines, the study aims to produce valid and reliable insights into the lived experiences of TSMs in the healthcare sector.

By combining epistemological perspectives, qualitative research methods, and ethical considerations, the study highlights the dynamics of skilled migration and its impact on policy outcomes.

## **RESULTS**

The results are outlined in two main parts:

Part 1 involves interviews with eight TSM participants, while Part 2 explores insights from focus group discussions with six key stakeholders. The research aimed to comprehend emerging issues, considering existing literature, and lived experiences in skilled migration within Australia's healthcare sector. Findings shed light on various aspects of TSMs' migration journeys, offering multiple perspectives that could inform policy reform, especially in nursing. The study empirically examined TSMs' level of control over their migration experiences and suggested that policymakers could benefit from integrating TSMs' lived experiences into policy-making processes. The findings pave the way for new discussions, inspire further research, and drive actions for enhancing temporary skilled migration programs in the healthcare sector.



*TSM participant key themes and dimensions*

Key themes	Key dimensions
Lived experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Reasons for migration</li> <li>➤ Experience of the migration process</li> <li>➤ Settlement and the quality of life</li> <li>➤ Qualifications/ job identification</li> </ul>
Context of migration in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Workplace culture and fit/ work-life balance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Induction and orientation</li> <li>– Training</li> </ul> </li> <li>➤ Discrimination/ racism</li> <li>➤ Industrial rights &amp; domestic workforce</li> </ul>
Participation (societal and institutional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Lifestyle and extracurricular activities: fundraising and spiritual commitments</li> <li>➤ Agency and involvement in decision-making               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Individual agency</li> <li>– Collective agency</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Institutional and government frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ TSM visa challenges and policy issues</li> <li>➤ Opportunities for reform</li> </ul>

FIGURE 1. TSM Participant Key themes and dimensions

*Stakeholder participant key themes and dimensions*

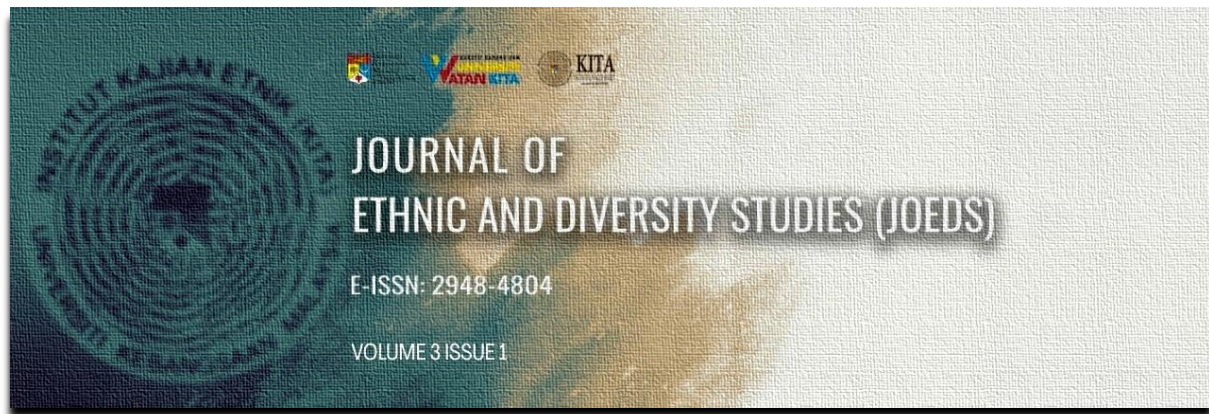
Key themes	Key dimensions
Participant TSM Program experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Relationship with TSMs</li> <li>Program satisfaction</li> <li>Attitudes</li> </ul>
Participation (societal and institutional)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Contributions</li> <li>Qualifications</li> <li>Agency and involvement in decision-making</li> </ul>
Context of Migration in Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Domestic workforce- lack of local experience and the ageing workforce</li> <li>2. Discrimination/ racism</li> </ul>
Institutional and Government Frameworks	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Skilled migration visa and policy issues</li> <li>4. Reform</li> </ul>

FIGURE 2. Stakeholder Participant key themes and dimensions

The research considers motivations for migration, settlement experiences, workplace challenges, and qualifications, unraveling essential aspects of TSMs' journeys. Part 2 focused on stakeholder perspectives, providing a comprehensive understanding of TSMs' experiences. Stakeholders, selected for their expertise and roles in the migration sector, offered valuable insights and diverse perspectives, enriching the depth of the study. Highlighted issues include challenges with nursing registration, qualification recognition, and recent changes impacting employment, necessitating reforms such as streamlining processes, revisiting permanent migration pathways, extending visa time frames, and involving migrants in the policy-making process.

The study confirms the need for TSMs to have substantive agency over their migration experiences and involves policy reforms, community integration, employer engagement, legal





advocacy, education, research, partnerships, and regular evaluation of the Australian skilled migration program. Recommendations emphasise aligning policies with migrants' experiences in the nursing profession, facilitating pathways to permanent residency, enhancing settlement support, and establishing exclusive hubs to assist TSMs throughout their migration journey, including pre and post migration.

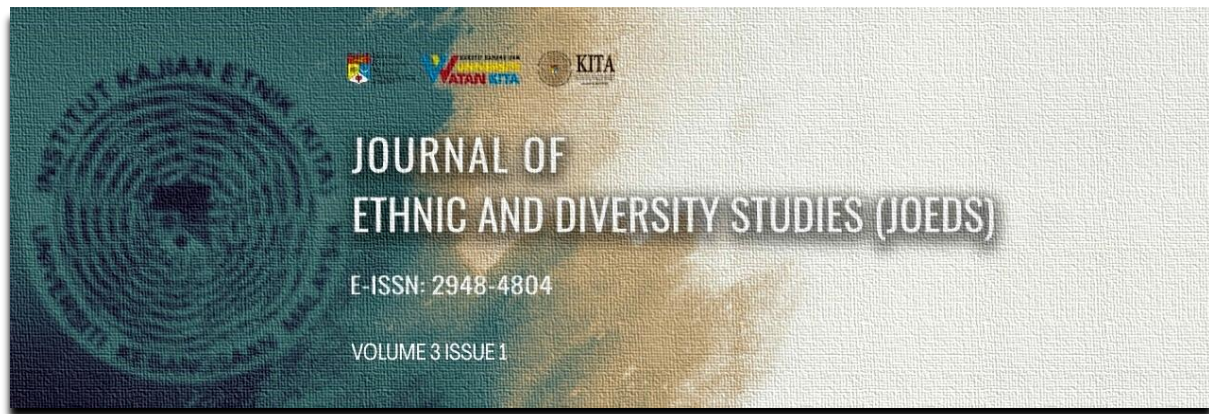
The central objective of the study is to deeply understand the extent of agency held by TSMs in the nursing profession throughout their migration journey. At its core, the study strives to enhance the well-being and agency of TSMs, recognising their substantial contributions to both society and the economy. By placing a strong emphasis on empowerment and active engagement, the study envisions a future where TSMs lead more productive and fulfilling lives while maintaining control over their migration paths.

Throughout the research, compelling insights have surfaced regarding the driving forces behind migration decisions, such as lifestyle improvements and promising job opportunities. Conversely, significant challenges like lengthy bureaucratic processes, financial burdens, and inadequate support structures have emerged as critical issues, particularly during the pre-migration stage. Contextual factors, including employment conditions and restrictions, experiences of discrimination, visa renewal costs and the scarcity of pathways to permanent residency, have profoundly shaped the experiences and stability of TSMs in Australia.

The study highlights the agency of TSMs in actively participating in Australian society, voicing concerns that affect them, and exerting influence over various other aspects of their lives. It has shed light on the obstacles related to social integration, workplace dynamics, and the frustration stemming from perceived neglect by authorities or decision-makers, which often hinder TSMs' ability to exercise their full agency. The research strongly advocates policy reforms and inclusive decision-making approaches that empower TSMs and encourage their active participation in societal, economic, and political realms.

In acknowledging its scope, the study acknowledges certain exceptions and limitations, such as its reliance on a relatively small sample size and its exclusive focus on the nursing profession. These factors may constrain the generalisability of the findings to broader populations of TSMs. Theoretical implications of the research emphasise the imperative to recognise and address power differentials and structural constraints that shape TSMs' migration experiences. On a practical level, the study calls for advocacy aimed at policy reforms and the implementation of tailored support services designed to empower TSMs and enhance their overall well-being.

The results of the study reflect a pressing need for more inclusive and supportive environments for TSMs in Australia. The results emphasise that while TSMs play a significant role in Australia's economy by filling critical skill shortages in sectors such as healthcare, engineering, IT, and construction, their contributions are often hindered by their temporary status. This temporary status creates uncertainty and instability, making it difficult for TSMs to fully integrate into Australian society. The study found that TSMs often have limited access to essential



services, such as healthcare, housing assistance, and social welfare, leading to social exclusion and marginalisation. Additionally, TSMs face challenges in securing additional employment opportunities due to visa restrictions, citing difficulty in keeping up with visa renewal payments.

The study also highlighted the significant barrier of limited pathways to permanent residency. TSMs are often caught in a cycle of temporary work without a clear route to stay in Australia permanently. The findings showed that the current visa system, with its complex and restrictive requirements, is a major obstacle for TSMs seeking to establish long-term futures in Australia, including the inability to focus on their personal dreams and goals. This lack of stability prevents TSMs from forming deeper, more meaningful connections with Australian society and impedes their ability to invest in their long-term career and personal development.

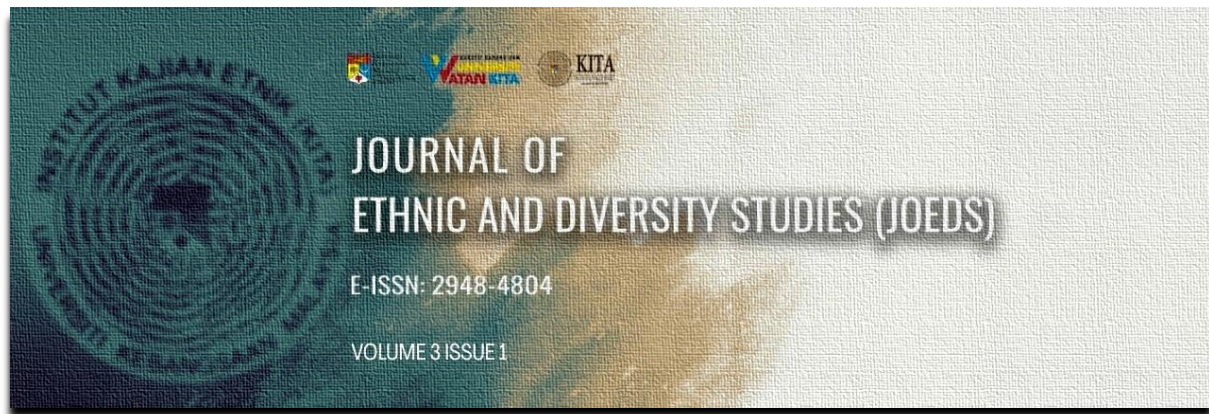
Another key result of the study was the identification of a major gap in TSMs' involvement in decision-making processes that affect their lives. TSMs are often excluded from the policy making processes that shape their migration experiences, leading to a disconnect between their needs and the policies that govern their lives. The study found that, as a result, TSMs often feel marginalised and disenfranchised, as their voices are not heard in the development of policies that directly impact them. The results of the study reflected that, due to the diverse nature of TSMs and the varying challenges they face across different sectors and regions, there is no one-size-fits-all approach to temporary skilled migration. The findings point to the need of policies to reflect the lived experiences of TSMs to be truly effective.

Despite these challenges, the study also emphasised that TSMs demonstrate considerable agency in navigating various aspects of their lives by actively seeking to improve their skills, build social networks, and contribute to their communities. However, without adequate support, they are often unable to fully leverage this agency to reach their potential when it comes to their migration journey. The study revealed that providing enhanced support structures for TSMs—such as access to healthcare, social services, career development and stability—would allow them to maximise their contributions to Australian society and economy.

The results of the study also highlighted the importance of including TSMs in the policy-making process. By involving TSMs in the development of policies and initiatives that affect them, the study found that policies would be better tailored to address their unique needs and challenges. This involvement would also foster a greater sense of ownership and empowerment among TSMs, encouraging their deeper engagement in Australian society. The study concluded that TSMs' voices need to be heard in the policy process, as their lived experiences offer crucial insights that are currently missing from the policy-making cycle.

The study revealed the necessity for greater social and cultural integration initiatives for TSMs. The research found that social isolation is a significant challenge for many TSMs, with cultural differences and language barriers often exacerbating their feelings of exclusion. The study emphasised the need for programs that encourage cross-cultural exchange and social networking to promote mutual understanding between TSMs and the broader Australian community. These





initiatives would not only help TSMs feel more connected but also foster stronger community ties and social cohesion.

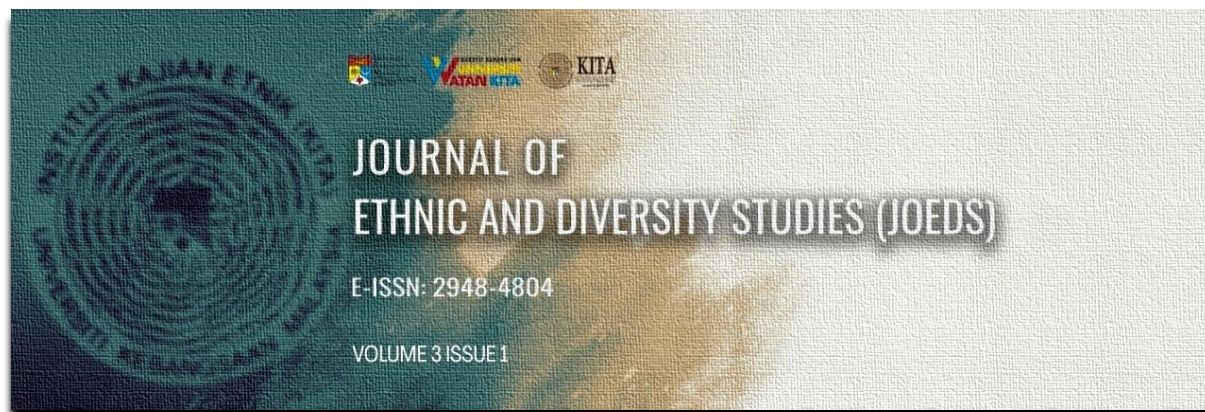
It is also important to note that some of the TSMs interviewed, despite having been in Australia for several years, still had to renew their visas and were not offered permanent residency. This is particularly noteworthy given that, during the COVID-19 pandemic, the government was actively seeking skilled migrants to fill critical nursing shortages. Many TSMs including those interviewed in this study, who were already working in healthcare and performing well, were still not considered for permanent residency. Meanwhile, during the same time, additional skilled migrants were being brought in to fill the same roles. This highlights the inconsistency in the treatment and opportunities available to TSMs who have already made significant contributions to key sectors like healthcare.

The results of this study reflect a critical need for policy adjustments that can address the barriers TSMs face in Australia. The findings highlight the importance of creating clearer pathways to permanent residency, expanding support services, and ensuring TSMs are actively involved in decision-making processes. The research highlights the necessity for tailored, inclusive policies that consider the diverse needs of TSMs and their potential to contribute to Australian society. By implementing these recommendations, Australia can ensure that TSMs are not just seen as temporary workers but as valuable, long-term contributors to the country's social and economic fabric.

## *CONCLUSION*

This study examines the agency of TSMs in the nursing profession throughout their migration journey, with a focus on enhancing their well-being and empowerment. The research identifies key motivations for migration, such as better opportunities and lifestyle improvements, while also revealing significant challenges like bureaucratic delays, financial burdens, and discrimination. Despite these obstacles, TSMs demonstrate agency by actively engaging with Australian society, voicing concerns, and trying to influence their circumstances. However, limited pathways to permanent residency and other structural barriers hinder their ability to fully exercise their agency.

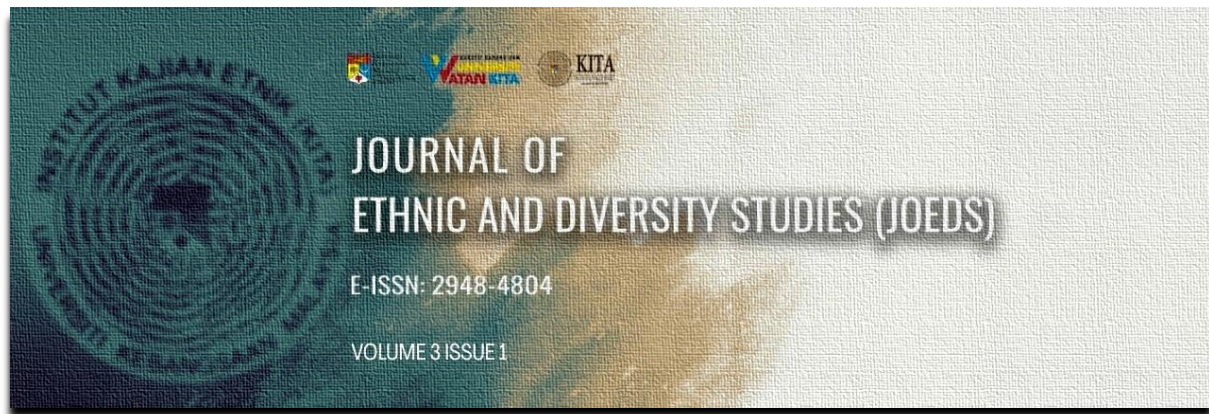
The study advocates policy reforms to remove barriers to permanent residency, improve support structures, and involve TSMs in decision-making processes that affect their lives. While acknowledging the study's limitations, including a small sample size and a focus on the nursing profession, it emphasises the need for more inclusive and supportive environments for TSMs. The research highlights the importance of recognising TSMs' contributions to Australian society and calls for changes that allow them to fully participate and thrive within the broader social, economic, and political frameworks.



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