

## International Vocational Education and Training – The Migration and Learning Mix

Ly Thi Tran, RMIT University  
Chris Nyland, Monash University

www.rmit.edu.au



## Presentation Outline

- Aims of the study
- Research approach
- The migration and learning mix

## Research Aims

- analyse the relationship between international VET students' purposes for investing in their courses and their learning practices
- explore how staff adapt their practices in response to international students' learning characteristics
- identify factors that shape VET's capacity and potential to cater for international students

## Research Approach

- More than 130 semi-structured interviews with international students, teachers, general staff, managers and CEOs from 22 training providers in NSW, QLD and VIC.
- Second interviews were conducted with a small number of students
- Email and phone dialogues
- Took part in student activities and visited them at their homes and workplaces in order to observe and understand the multiple dimensions of their life and study in Australia.
- Theory and practice class observation

## Study Motives

- The data uncovered four variations of the complex relationship between permanent residency (PR) and international students' motives in undertaking VET courses:
  - some students are motivated to enrol in a VET course by a dual desire to secure PR and attain the skills associated with their chosen occupation
  - the second group see PR as the sole reason to enrol in VET course
  - the third views migration as a 'second chance opportunity',
  - the fourth have no interest in gaining PR or have lost any interest they may once have had.

## Study Motives

- The data also reveals international VET students view:
  - VET as a pathway to university
  - VET course as a means to enhance skills to secure employment in home country
  - VET as a means to gain some hand-on experience
  - VET as a means to transformation and enrichment of personal and professional experiences

- Motivated by the associated profession and at the same time wanted to secure permanent residency (PR)

– First of all, I am very interested in cooking, that's my love, my passion... And the course is also a stepping stone for permanent residency. My love for cooking makes me really interested in the course right now and the PR gives me the will to survive, it gives me the drive to try harder (Filipino, Cookery, TAFE, VIC)

- Permanent Residency as the sole reason to enrol in VET course

– Because I am going to become a chef. That's why I want to study patisserie... No, no. I was not interested in becoming a chef because when I was in Vietnam I used to be an IT man. I came here to study patisserie because my uncle here will open a bakery shop, that's why he asked me to study this one.... (Vietnamese, Patisserie, TAFE, VIC).

7

Permanent Residency: a later development that presented as a 'second chance' opportunity as a consequence of international students' study in Australia:

- Now since I've been here for nearly one year and I quite like here. If I can, I would like to apply for permanent residency. Before I came here I had no idea whether I am going to like this place or not because I've never been overseas. It is my first time. I'd never been out of my province in the South of China, near to Hong Kong. (Chinese, Hospitality, TAFE, NSW).

8

### Change their mind about PR or insist on PR?

- Well, when I first came to Australia two years ago, I definite thought I was going to live in this country forever... Now I am thinking I'm still young and there are so many opportunities around the world. I am going to travel around the world and actually live in different countries (Korean, Cookery, TAFE, NSW).
- Oh yeah. Because the fact all the money it costs to set the whole thing up, we just can't walk away. No way... Yeah, all the money. Like I reckon by the time next year finishes I would have spent about \$150,000... The fee is \$23,000. The kids fees for this year and next year will be \$32,000... Set up house, rent a house. All the bills you pay. General money you spend we'll be about \$150,000... Yeah, yeah. So just stay here till I qualify, just stay in it, can't just walk away. (Irish, Cabinet making, TAFE, QLD)
- I want to continue to study in this subject [Lab technology] because I majored in biology at high school. First I wanted to do medicine but it is too expensive... and I found that diploma is much cheaper than a degree... Then I would apply for PR because if I do medicine or science, as an international students, I have to pay full fee, more than 40 thousands dollar per year (Srilankan, Lab technology, TAFE, VIC).

9

### Originally only motivated to undertake the course to obtain PR but later on feel connected with the subject

- Ly: And clearly, from what you said, I can see a change from having no idea about hairdressing to falling in love with it or at least enjoying it now. And what do you think the most important factors that have led to the change?
- An: I think the first thing is I can get PR by hairdressing. It makes me love it. And after that, it's my friends. It's really, really nice people. Like because there are a lot of girls study in hairdressing. It's not a lot of men. So I like talking with beautiful girls and this makes me love hairdressing. And my teacher also is really kind and friendly and he's shown me that all his techniques about cutting and how to make a nice cutting. And after that I feel, yeah, I love it (Vietnamese, Hairdressing, Private college, VIC).
- I was very bored in cooking. And I am scared at how can I go through this course because I never done any cooking before. But the method of teaching and teachers are so good that now I am feeling very confident to cooking and I can work in the industry also. I enjoy everything. I enjoy most every day. Every hour, I enjoy... They [the teachers] are taking care all the time. They are pushing students, pushing for the whole of the students. And they always checking their students are taking the skills or not. They are very friendly and they are helping but at the same time they are strict also. They don't let you go for a single time... I want to be a chef. *It's my dream now* (Indian, Cookery, TAFE, QLD)

10

### The desire to fulfil professional aspiration and enhance skills that can secure good employment

- I'm willing to do it because I love what I do... I mean I know I will be eligible for PR but I am not focusing into it. I am not crazy all over it because I think that is the bonus to my part. But my main point is I have to keep myself focused on my career, profession, refining my skills and that's the most important (Thai, Hospitality management, TAFE, NSW).
- I found if I combine Korean cuisine with the Western cuisine it will rock in this country and anywhere in the world. Because many Koreans have come here and they are doing their restaurants, and it's all just plain Korean and many of the places are not good. My goal is actually to raise that standard by combining these stuffs. Actually, there is a chef from Belgium who is actually doing it. So maybe I can learn from him (Korean, Cookery, TAFE, NSW).

11

### VET as a pathway to university

- It is because I am very interested in game design. This course in this TAFE can be connected to another university, called UTS. The game design course in UTS only accepts the people who finish from this course. (Chinese, TAFE, NSW)
- Well first, I wanted to be bilingual in English... I have to be bilingual and maybe this course will help me to get into a university. If I can hopefully get a bit of money before and I can maybe enrol for one year or two years in a university. So I think that is a good way to stay, to get a diploma and to have access then later to uni. And if not, I can still go back home and have a diploma I can start to find a job as well. So yeah and I like the fact that it's not as hard as uni, it's a bit more relaxed. (French, Communication and media, TAFE, NSW)

12

### VET as a means to pursue professional interest and gain hand-on experience

- I just used to be at [A] university, it just focuses on theory. I just study the theory every day. Come to school just two hours a day and like three days a week. And then I pay a lot of money so I want to study a lot. Just come to the school and just go to like theatre and listen to teacher to talk to me and like cannot study a lot. I want to study like practise for a lot. So I change to this course because I heard from my friend that this school provides me an opportunity to gain practical skills... My father didn't agree with me because you know in Vietnam, degree is like higher than diploma, it's higher education. But like I want a different way. Yeah. So like I often agree with him a lot but at that time I didn't I chose the course he suggested... I actually don't care much about the permanent residency. My purpose to come here is just studying. But my mother and my father want me to take the PR to stay here. Like in my mind I just want to study. I just want to focus on study. I tell my mum that when I changed the course, I cannot apply for PR. ***I will go back to my country because actually I love my country more than here*** (Vietnamese, Resort management, TAFE, VIC).

13

### Some tentative views

- VET students: vibrant and mobile people who act on their dreams for the future and are motivated by multiple, differing and shifting aims.
- These motives may be both instrumental and intrinsic and can include obtaining of permanent residency, accumulation of skills that can secure good employment, gaining a foothold that can lead to higher education, and/or personal transformation.
- These are neither fixed nor unitary but can be shaped and reshaped by their families and by the social world and the learning environment with which they interact
- Stereotype that holds VET students are mere 'PR hunters' is unjust and constitutes a threat to the international VET sector.
- Whatever a student's study purpose s/he needs to engage in a learning experience and should be entitled to a high quality education and training.

14

Thank you for your listening!

Email: [lythi.tran@rmit.edu.au](mailto:lythi.tran@rmit.edu.au)

*The project is funded by the Australian Research Council.*

We would like to thank:

The advisory group for this project: Simon Marginson, Kate Dempsey, Rebecca Biazzo, Sophie Arkoudis, Helen Forbes-Mewett and Chris Ziguas.

15