

# Stereotyping VET international students as mere 'PR hunters' and its impacts on their learning and well-being

Ly Thi Tran  
RMIT University, Australia  
*lythi.tran@rmit.edu.au*

[www.rmit.edu.au](http://www.rmit.edu.au)



## Presentation Outline

- The study aims
- Research design
- Relationship between migration and VET study
- Impacts of stereotyping international students as mere 'PR hunters' on their learning and well-being

## 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

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## Research Approach

- More than 150 semi-structured interviews with international students, teachers, support staff, managers and CEOs from 25 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
- Theory and practice class observation

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## Study Motives

- Four variations of the complex relationship between permanent residency (PR) and international students' motives in undertaking VET courses:
  - A dual desire to secure PR and attain the skills associated with their chosen occupation
  - PR as the sole reason to enrol in VET course
  - Migration as a 'second chance opportunity',
  - No interest in gaining PR or have lost any interest they may once have had

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## 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

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- **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).

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**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).

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## 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).

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## 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).

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## How the stereotype impacts upon teaching and learning

- I felt that my contribution is not valued. That is because I am seen as someone who comes here to take something from the system, like a PR [permanent residency]. But I felt that they didn't recognise that I want to be part of it and contribute something [*Crying*].... Or just treat it as if, you know, like you take no interest in the class or even in the people around you. That really makes me angry if I see that. **But I feel I'm not like that so why treat me the same way?** (Indian, Community welfare, TAFE, VIC).

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## How the stereotype impacts upon teaching and learning

- And so there's a lot of just pass them, just pass them, just pass them. I think there's significant latitude given to international students because they don't care, they are only interested in PR. The teacher doesn't really care... I think teachers who've even been teaching for a long time are getting worn down because they think, well why should I try to make my curriculum innovative? Why should I try to teach them in different ways if they don't care about learning anyway? So there seems to be a bit of a cease fire where, well I'll teach the minimum requirements. So really what we've done is we've just slipped into mediocrity... And I think the teachers just said, you know what? What's the point? I'm still getting paid my hourly rate. I'll make it easier for everyone. So we see more multiple choice questions. We see things that are easier to mark because hey, they don't care. Why should I care? ...Well again, this is what comes back to what I said about who are the people registering the private RTOs? They don't have any social or educational responsibility. They're not interested in having any. That's not a requirement for them to remain registered. That's not the reason why they started the company... (Hospitality Management, Private College, VIC)

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## The impacts upon the ways students are treated

- And some head teachers even been quite rude to students and turn students away and say do other course, why don't you do other course? That course is higher point than my course [childcare]. In one of the cases and sometimes, at the end of, near the end of last term, we had to rush to transfer a student to other college. Say things like "you may want to consider studying another course that is more suited to your goal of getting residency."...Well this student came to me and the counsellor advised her to see me, the student is really interested in studying childcare, and doing quite well. She's not the one that really just wants to get the residency or fill in the time.  
(Support Staff, TAFE, NSW)

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## The impacts upon the ways students are taught and treated

- There is a lot of stigma that you're doing the TAFE course and getting residency. Like on my very first day at this TAFE college they have a tea, a tea party... And on the very first day the Program Manager asked me, **are you doing this for residency?**... I thought that's a very weird question to ask me because first that's somewhat private to what my reason is, apart from wanting to do the course or any other reason I have is a bit private. And secondly, **it's like putting a label on me already you want to see me as someone who is after PR.** I feel that there is a stigma attached to it as if these students come here and they do the course just for migration... And I think if you want someone to genuinely do the course or genuinely be part of your community then it's your job to help them do that. So maybe help them find a good placement, help them under systems, help them learn. **Instead if you treat us with suspicion all the time and say, well you're not really interested in learning, you're just here for the permanent visa, then there's no help offered to us in finding placements** (Indian, Nursing, TAFE, VIC).

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## At the workplace

- One day in the kitchen, one of the guys asked me what does Arbella really wants to do? I mean like do you think this is not the thing that I really want to do? He just assumes that I am doing this for PR and anything like that. I told them I just ignore the questioner and I want to be good with wines and coffee and I really want to work with really good restaurant. He, then, got impression that I want to be a chef. **So it's kind of frustrating to be seen in those kinds of standard that if you are not a resident, and you are studying cookery so you must be after PR. You must only for PR.** So it is kind of frustrating (Korean, Cookery, TAFE, NSW)

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## Part time employment opportunity

- Yeah, if you go for the job of some places, they think that Indians are just for the permanent resident. But not everyone is like that... So employers don't want to employ us... Saying they are students but they just don't want to study and develop the skills, they just want to get PR. If so many person in the industry and the teachers also saying that Indian students are not attempting as hard as other nationalities. There are some students, Indian students, who are not studying hard or they're just after the PR or the job. So but not everyone is the same...Yeah but we know that in some of the way our friends are responsible for this and people getting these perceptions that Indians are like that. So we cannot blame totally to the local people here. There is some responsibility on us also. (Indian, Cookery, TAFE, QLD)
- Partly yes, partly no. Some employers are scared. They're scared that if I employ this person, all they're really going to do is want me to sign them off for PR. Then as soon as I sign them off for PR, they're gone. And that has happened in some cases. He signs the paper one day and the person's gone the next day. Is it going to upset my customers if I have too many overseas workers? And that can happen. I've got an employer out there that says, I would like to take on a Vietnamese baker but my customers would not allow that. So that would affect my business so I can't choose to do that. So all of those things are relevant. (Teacher, Bakery, TAFE, VIC)

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## 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 goals.
- 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.

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Thank you for your listening!

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

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