

Education or Exit? Mapping the Dual Motivations Behind Student Migration from India

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Abstract

The research article uses a push-pull approach to identify the factors determining students' intentions to study abroad. The article systematically identifies and categorizes the primary factors that influence students' decisions to pursue education abroad. The research contributes to the literature by refining a theoretical framework that explains the relationship between various motivational factors and students' intentions to study abroad. The research framework is based on push-pull theory adapted specifically to the context of educational migration. The study also provides a nuanced understanding of how these factors weigh in on the decision-making processes of career and migration-focused students.

Keywords

Educational migration, pull factors, push factors, study abroad

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Introduction

Educational migration, the movement of students beyond their country for the purpose of pursuing education, has emerged as a significant global trend in recent decades. As higher education becomes increasingly internationalized, students are no longer confined to the academic institutions within their own countries; instead, they seek out the best opportunities available worldwide, driven by aspirations for quality education, specialized programs, and better career prospects. The

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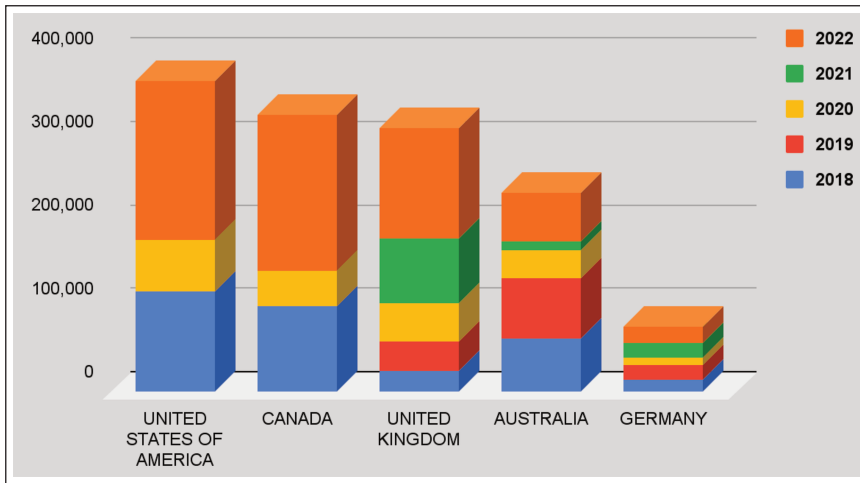


Figure 1. Trends in the Indian Student Movement from 2018 to 2022.

Source: Uniacco.com.

dynamics of educational migration are shaped by various “push” and “pull” factors. Push factors typically involve conditions in a student’s home country that encourage them to seek education elsewhere, such as limited access to quality education, political instability, economic hardship, or a lack of suitable academic programs. Conversely, pull factors are the attractive features of the destination country or institution, including high academic standards, advanced research opportunities, cultural diversity, and the potential for improved employment outcomes post-graduation.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) report clearly illustrates the rising trend of Indian students choosing to pursue their studies overseas. The fact that there are more than 1.5 million Indian students studying abroad (20% more than the previous year) shows how popular foreign education is becoming among young Indians (FRR Forex, 2024). Figure 1 depicts the trends in the Indian student movement over 5 years.

Figure 1 indicates that the top countries of study for Indian students pursuing higher education abroad are the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Australia, and Germany, whereas Figure 2 shows the top Indian states sending students abroad. The shape of outbound mobility from India has altered during 2023, with the UK and the United States gaining a significant share of Indian students, and Australia recording more growth in Indian enrollments compared with 2022 (Singh, 2024). After the epidemic, there was a noticeable rise in the number of Indian students studying overseas. About 750,000 Indian students pursued higher education overseas in 2022, as compared to 450,000 in 2017 and 260,000 in 2020 (www.statista.com). Furthermore, in 2022, India overtook China as the country from which the majority of foreign students enroll in United States universities.

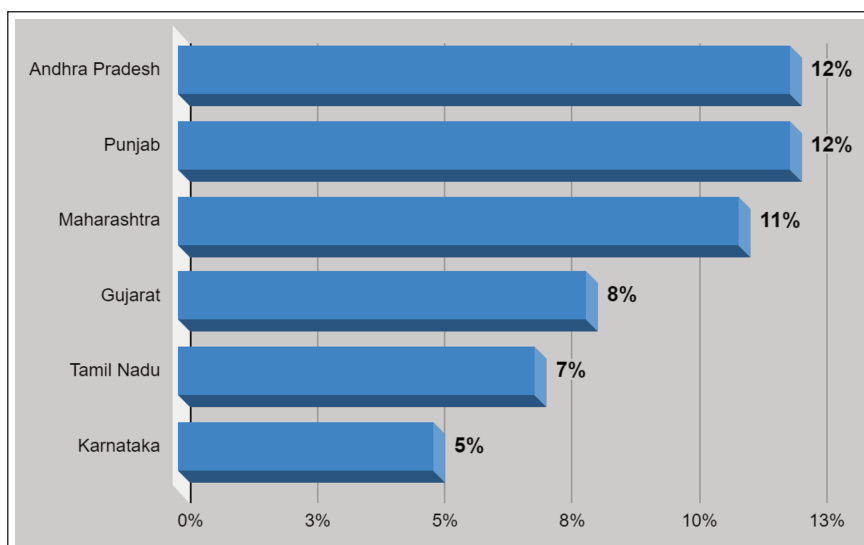


Figure 2. Top Indian States Sending Students Abroad (2024).

Source: Oxford International Digital Institute.

In the contemporary global education market, host countries are concentrating on students of Asian descent in general, and Indian students in particular due to many reasons. First, they bring revenue to the host country (Lee et al., 2006; Marginson, 2002). Second, they aid in increasing cultural variety and add value to the teaching and research segment (Altbach & Knight, 2007; Bolsmann & Miller, 2008; Wilkins & Huisman, 2011). International students are more than just applicants to universities; if they stay and work in the country of their graduation, they have the potential to make a substantial contribution to the economic growth, competitiveness in the global market, and success of local businesses (Altbach, 2004; Wei, 2013). International students create significant earnings and economic contributions (Consterdine & Everton, 2012).

Although studying abroad can bring several benefits on an individual level, there can be several disadvantages for the country as a whole. Talented and skilled individuals who go abroad for education may choose to remain there for better career opportunities, leading to a loss of human capital (Davoudpour, 2024; Smith & Jones, 2023). The migration of innovative minds can stifle domestic research, development, and entrepreneurial activities (Gordon & Patel, 2021). A significant exodus of young people can alter the demographic structure, potentially leading to an aging population without a corresponding influx of young professionals. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including improving the quality of domestic education, creating attractive opportunities for skilled professionals within the country, and fostering an environment conducive to innovation and growth (Jackson & Allen, 2024; Parker & Lewis, 2023).

The education sector, like any other, is working hard to put its marketing plans into action in order to maintain its lead in the cutthroat market. According to Daily

et al. (2010), there is fierce competition among universities; the ability of higher education institutions to draw in more international students has become a critical asset. Therefore, it becomes imperative to identify what drives students' intentions to study abroad. Foreign countries, as well as institutes, will be able to design marketing strategies to attract Indian students based on such factors. The ability to differentiate the determinants of career-focused and migration-focused students will help host institutions as well as host countries to plan a differentiated marketing strategy to stand exceptional from their competitors, hence justifying the need for the present study. When talented students leave India for education and subsequently for work opportunities abroad, the country faces a significant loss of skilled professionals, commonly referred to as brain drain. Retaining these talents within the country can contribute to national development and innovation. Hence, the findings will also be helpful for Indian educational institutes and policymakers to keep a check on brain drain.

The article is structured as follows: a thorough review of the literature pertaining to the topic is done in the next part. The conceptual framework and methodology used are covered in the third section. The results are shown in the fourth section. The article is concluded with a discussion of the key findings and implications.

Review of Literature

The decision to pursue higher education abroad is indeed multifaceted, influenced by a myriad of personal, academic, economic, cultural, and institutional factors. Understanding these determinants is crucial for gaining insights into the motivations and considerations that drive students' intentions to study abroad. This literature review provides a holistic understanding of the complex interplay of these factors in shaping students' intentions to study abroad.

Push-pull Approach

The "push-pull" approach applies to cross-border migration, particularly the worldwide mobility of international students. This model has become a fundamental theory in the discipline. The components in this approach are quite relevant in the decision-making process of overseas students (Baruch et al., 2007). In general, there are two main forces at work: (a) "pull factors" or "where to go" that lure the student to immigrate to the host country, and (b) "push factors" or "whether to go" that lead the student to emigrate from the home country.

Push factors which operate within the home country include limited educational opportunities, lower quality of education, the population's wealth in the home country, the developing nation's level of participation in the global economy, the growth rate of the gross national product, and poor job prospects in the home country. Liu et al. (2023) have also added higher educational costs in the host country and English language requirements as push factors of the host country. On the other hand, pull factors attract students with the promise of

higher-quality education, diverse academic programs, better career opportunities, cultural experiences, and the potential for personal growth in a new environment (Lee & Tan, 1984; Lindgren-Gatfield & Hyde, 2005). The push forces revolve around the acquisition and/or growth of three major capitals: human, financial, and psychological. Pull aspects revolve around the attracting capacity of three major entities: the destination country, the hosting city, and the academic institution (Shkoler & Rabenu, 2020). Push factors generate a general interest in foreign study but do not provide individuals with specific guidance, whereas pull factors are specific to potential host countries and institutions (Davis, 1995; Li & Bray, 2007).

Push Factors

Personal Factors. Personal factors encompass individual characteristics, preferences, and aspirations. These may include the desire for personal growth, exposure to new experiences, and opportunities for self-discovery and independence. The decision to study abroad is often influenced by peers and social networks. Lee and Morrish (2012) highlighted the influential role of parents in the decision-making process of both Chinese and Indian students regarding pursuing higher education overseas. The guidance and insights provided by peers and former students can also play a crucial role in shaping students' choices to study abroad. Additionally, Yang (2007) pointed out that factors such as the availability of fellow compatriots, past travel experiences, and the aspiration for global exposure are among the personal motivations that drive students to seek education internationally. Moreover, the students who want to grow psychologically might decide that going overseas for higher education is a good way to accomplish so (Yakunina et al., 2013). Enhancing independence, self-efficacy, pride in oneself, acceptance of ambiguity, exposure to different cultures, educational philosophies, and/or environments, among other things, can all help achieve this (Cubillo et al., 2006; Huong & Cong, 2018; Minh & Tien, 2024; Nathan, 2017). Butkovic et al. (2024) found that young age students who are adventurous and have high motivational cultural intelligence were more likely to study abroad. Even students with high socioeconomic status are more prone to study abroad (Entrich et al., 2024). According to the study carried out by Fombona et al. (2013), a key driver that encourages students to take part in study abroad programs is the presence of professional prospects. Moreover, the potential for a successful career that comes with these programs enhances the overall experience positively. Hence, the following hypothesis has been assumed:

H_1 : Personal factors have a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad.

Educational System Constraints in India

The Ministry of Human Resource Development has released data from the All-India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE, 2021–2022), revealing that there are 1168 universities, 45,473 colleges, and 12,002 stand-alone institutions in India.

Despite the growing number of universities in the country, a significant portion of students choose to pursue their education overseas. For students from the progression segment, the main reason for this decision is the strict admission requirements in India, which heavily influence their choice to seek higher education abroad. Various studies have shown that the intense competition in the local education sector, especially for prestigious institutions, plays a major role in this trend (Agarwal, 2011; Teter & Martin, 2014). For example, more than 90% of students who opt for the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT) and Indian Institute of Management (IIM) entrance exams do not get accepted, leading many to pave their way into foreign universities (The Financial Express, 2008). In 2012, half a million students competed for just 9,590 seats at the IITs, while the IIMs received nearly 200,000 applications for 15,500 seats. The odds of a prospective engineering student securing a spot at the prestigious IITs are less than 2%. Additionally, in 2011, Sri Ram College of Commerce (SRCC), a top commerce college in India, set a minimum cut-off of 100% marks for science students applying for admission. These statistics highlight the challenges faced by Indian students in gaining admission to high-quality institutions within the country, prompting many to look abroad for their higher education. Although the quality of courses in Indian colleges is improving, there's still a noticeable gap in the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Consequently, many Indian students face difficulties securing employment after completing their studies (Barerah, 2018). Hence, the following hypothesis has been assumed:

H₂: Educational system constraints have a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad.

Pull Factors

Host Country Image

The perception of a country, encompassing factors such as political stability, safety, natural beauty, and cultural environment, plays a crucial role in shaping the university's brand and attracting students. The country's image significantly impacts students' intentions as it forms their initial impression of the educational institutions they are considering (Cubillo et al., 2006). Students are inclined toward countries offering a high quality of life, which includes access to good healthcare, education, and public services. According to the OECD Better Life Index, countries like Canada, Australia, and Scandinavian nations are highly ranked in these aspects, making them desirable destinations for students seeking to study abroad. Moreover, personal safety is a key consideration, with students preferring countries with low crime rates and stable political climates. The research conducted by Ward et al. (2001) underscores the importance of safety in the decision-making process of international students when choosing their study destinations. Various studies, including those by Cubillo et al. (2006) and Rudd et al. (2012), have also highlighted the significant influence of city image on the mobility decisions of outward students. Given that students are often far from home, factors such as safety, a welcoming environment, and

friendliness play a crucial role in their selection of a host nation (Anderson & Bhati, 2012). Moreover, researchers discovered that in order to get meaningful life experience, students choose to study in countries with cultures that are different from their own and interesting to study (Clavel, 2015; Eder et al., 2010). Political proximity between nations was also identified as a motivator for choosing a host country (Nguyen, 2013; Pugach, 2012). Additionally, students are also concerned about their living conditions and the associated costs (Anderson & Bhati, 2012; Clavel, 2015). Hence, the following hypothesis has been assumed:

H₃: Host country image has a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad.

Conducive Environment

Students with migration intentions are greatly impacted by the presence of clear and achievable pathways to permanent residency (PR) (Larsen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2002). Countries such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand provide relatively uncomplicated PR routes for international graduates, making them appealing destinations. The overall friendliness of a country's immigration laws, including the ease of obtaining student visas and transitioning to work visas or PR, plays a critical role (Altbach, 2004; Baas, 2006; Chen, 2007; Gribble, 2008; Li & Bray, 2007; Tremblay, 2005; Yang, 2007). Additionally, the opportunities for earning while learning, high prospects of employment, and income opportunities are prominent factors influencing outward student mobility (Brooks & Waters, 2009; Deumert et al., 2005). The importance of post-study work visas, including their availability and duration, cannot be overstated. Nations that offer graduates the opportunity to remain and work for extended periods, such as Canada with its Post-Graduation Work Permit (up to 3 years) and Australia with its Temporary Graduate Visa (up to 4 years), are particularly appealing for students. The labor market and job prospects in the host country play a significant role in shaping students' choices (Brooks & Waters, 2009; Deumert et al., 2005). As highlighted by Yang (2007), the skilled immigration policy of the host country is a major attraction. Similarly, visa issues have been identified as a key barrier (Eder et al., 2010). Nations with robust economies and a high demand for skilled labor offer better opportunities for international graduates to find employment, which is crucial for their migration plans. Hence, the following hypothesis has been assumed:

H₄: A conducive environment has a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad.

Institutional Factors

Institutional factors refer to the reputation and rankings of universities, accreditation, and opportunities for research, internships, and employment post-graduation. Admission criteria and academic entry standards are important variables that students evaluate when selecting host universities (McCarthy et al., 2012). Career-oriented students are greatly impacted by the international standings and prestige

of educational establishments. Colleges with renowned academic curricula and research resources draw in students seeking to advance their credentials (Ancheh et al., 2007; Shanka et al., 2006; Sia, 2010). As per the QS World University Rankings (2023), institutions in the US, UK, and Australia are highly favored. Qualifications from accredited institutions with global recognition hold significant appeal. These qualifications are frequently sought after by employers worldwide, bolstering the employability of graduates. International students are also concerned about the location of the host institution and the presence of other international students since, in addition to their academics, they also want to enjoy life, build their network, and get ready for the global job market (Hemsley-Brown, 2012; Jobbins, 2015; Price et al., 2003; Rooijen, 2015). Furthermore, colleges that provide extensive help for their academic and non-academic issues are in high demand (Pimpa, 2003). Tuition fees of the respective host institution were also found as an important factor while deciding to study abroad. Hence, the following hypothesis has been assumed:

H₅: Institutional factors have a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad.

Career-focused Versus Migration-focused Students

The students intending to study abroad generally have two types of objectives in mind. One can be acquiring quality education while the other might be migrating and settling abroad. Accordingly, these have been categorized as career-focused and migration-focused students, and their intentions to study abroad might be influenced by different factors. The quality of higher education significantly impacts the mobility of students, especially in the Indian context. Insufficient infrastructure and low-quality courses are driving 600,000 Indian students to seek education at top universities abroad (Mishra, 2012). Pull factors such as the perceived quality of overseas programs, the ability to gain entry into preferred courses, and the desire to improve competency are stronger influences on students' decisions to pursue internationally recognized institutions, excellent teaching and learning environments, specialized courses, and high research facilities are also significant pull factors for students seeking career advancement (Kemp et al., 1998; Maringe & Carter, 2007). Colleges with renowned academic curricula and research resources draw in students seeking to advance their credentials (Ancheh et al., 2007; Shanka et al., 2006; Sia, 2010). Students in the immigration sector primarily choose to study abroad as a means to facilitate their migration process. According to a study by Choudaha and Chang (2012), students with migration intentions prefer countries with lenient immigration policies. The main driving force for these students is their desire to relocate. Currently, there is a significant number of students worldwide, particularly from developing nations, who aspire to pursue education in developed countries with the goal of eventually migrating (Larsen & Vincent-Lancrin, 2002; OECD, 2004). Indian students, for instance, were not primarily attracted to Australian universities for their academic reputation, but rather for the opportunity to apply for PR

post-graduation (Baas, 2006). The immigration segment students prioritize programs that increase their chances of immigration in the destination country, rather than investing significant time and money in education. The visa and immigration policies of various countries play a crucial role in their decision-making process, influencing their choice of host country and impacting outward student mobility. Countries like Australia and Canada, with lenient immigration policies, are popular choices among Indian students seeking to fulfill their immigration aspirations. Overseas education is seen as a pathway to migration, with many international students viewing it as a means to secure PR in a country offering a high quality of life, as well as enhanced employment and research prospects. Thus, the projected hypotheses of the study are:

- H_{6a} : The relationship between personal factors and students' intention to study abroad is not different for career-focused and migration-focused students.
- H_{6b} : The relationship between Educational System Constraints and students' intention to study abroad is not different for career-focused and migration-focused students.
- H_{6c} : The relationship between host country image and students' intention to study abroad is not different for career-focused and migration-focused students.
- H_{6d} : The relationship between Conducive Environment and students' intention to study abroad is not different for career-focused and migration-focused students.
- H_{6e} : The relationship between institutional factors and students' intention to study abroad is not different for career-focused and migration-focused students.

The following Figure 3 focuses on the research framework, which is derived with the help of the above-mentioned hypothesis.

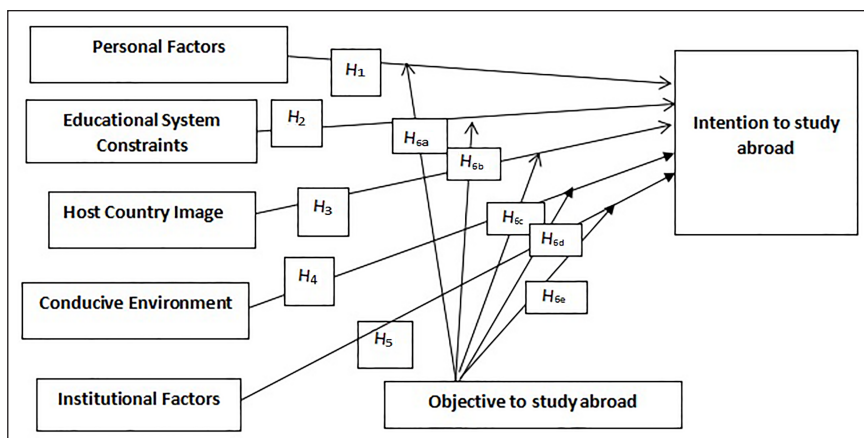


Figure 3. Research Framework.

Research Methodology

Data Collection and Sample Design

A structured questionnaire devised after an extensive review of literature and face validity testing was floated to respondents through the Google platform to collect primary data. The questionnaire was sent to students of various schools and colleges in the northern region of India. Out of the total 708 respondents, only 286 were willing to go abroad for tertiary education, which shows that only 40% of the sampled students were willing to study abroad. A total of 135 students were planning to go for quality education, whereas 151 were willing to study abroad for migration purposes. The questionnaire was divided into two parts; the first part contained questions assessing various factors influencing students' outward mobility on a five-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree, whereas the second part collected data on the demographic profile of the students. Previous research has stated that non-probability-based sampling should be employed when gathering data from a specific population (Nardi, 2006). Since the sample frame is unavailable and the demographic is specific (students intending to pursue further education abroad), judgment sampling was employed. A total of 286 valid answers were obtained and analyzed using statistical methods. The demographic information of the selected students is shown in Table 1.

Survey Instrument

The present study is a survey-based study. A self-structured questionnaire was used, which was designed after an extensive review of literature. The measurement items and constructs were taken from literature. To check face validity of the

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents.

Variable	Category	Frequency
Gender	Male	177
	Female	109
Age	16–20	169
	20–24	117
	Above 24	Nil
Current level of study	+1 or +2	153
	Graduation	133
	Post-graduation	Nil
Family annual income	Below 5 lakhs	47
	5 lakhs to 10 lakhs	158
	10 lakhs and above	81
Siblings/friends	Live abroad	147
	Do not live abroad	139

Table 2. Measurement Items.

Constructs	Indicators	Statements	Mean	SD
Personal factors (PF)	PF1	Personal intention to move abroad for higher education	3.318	1.335
	PF2	Family/friends recommendation	3.287	1.337
	PF3	Friends/relatives settled in host country	3.294	1.337
Educational system constraints in India (EC)	EC1	Unavailability of seats in desired institution	3.545	1.009
	EC2	Unavailability of desired courses	3.573	1.014
	EC3	Poor quality courses	3.549	.991
	EC4	Inadequate higher education infrastructure	3.598	.991
	EC5	Limited placements/limited job opportunities	3.538	1.005
Host country image (CI)	CI1	Political stability	3.605	1.035
	CI2	Safety issues	3.605	1.025
	CI3	Cultural environment	3.689	1.089
	CI4	Cost of living	3.654	1.039
	CI5	No racial discrimination	3.633	1.049
Conducive environment (CE)	CE1	Convenient visa process	3.587	0.814
	CE2	Conducive immigration policy	3.584	0.930
	CE3	Opportunity for part-time jobs	3.591	0.879
	CE4	High employment opportunities after course	3.500	1.096
	CE5	Good working conditions in companies of host country	3.563	0.997
Institutional factors (IF)	IF1	Institution reputation and ranking.	3.650	0.787
	IF2	Tuition fees	3.696	0.799
	IF3	Financial assistance/scholarship	3.650	0.838
	IF4	Quality of faculty	3.780	0.774
	IF5	Wide variety of courses	3.643	0.779
	IF6	Feedback/review of institution	3.622	0.800
	IF7	Placement track record	3.657	0.816
	IF8	Detailed information is available on the institution's website/social media	3.706	0.801
Student intention to study abroad (SA)	SA1	I will consider going abroad for higher education	3.080	1.316
	SA2	It is highly possible that I will go abroad for higher education	3.073	1.319
	SA3	I will definitely go abroad for higher education	3.066	1.279

questionnaire, it was given to two academic experts for their review. Pre-testing was also done on a small sample of 30 students to ensure the authenticity of the questionnaire. The measurement items are shown in Table 2.

Data Analysis Methods

PLS-SEM was used for data analysis because of its causal predictive nature. It not only explains causality among constructs rather analyze predictive quality of the results. This approach is best suited where the objective is to extend the existing theory (Hair et al., 2011; Ringle et al., 2015). In this research, Smart PLS software (Version 3) has been used for data analysis.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Common Method Bias

The issue of common method bias may occur when primary data is gathered via survey methods and responses are obtained from a single instrument for both independent and dependent variables (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Harman single factor method is generally used to analyze CMB in data. Here, all the variables of exogenous and endogenous constructs are put into a single factor through exploratory factor analysis, and if the total variance explained by that single factor is less than 50%, then the absence of CMB is proved. In the present study, Harman's single-factor method was employed in PASW software, where the single factor explained 41.1% of the variance. Hence, the absence of CMB was ensured in the data (Streukens et al., 2017).

Measurement Model Analysis

Before proceeding with hypothesis testing through bootstrapping procedures, it is imperative to check the measurement properties of the specified model. In measurement model analysis, indicator viability, construct reliability, convergent validity and discriminant validity are evaluated. For this composite reliability, Cronbach's alpha and AVE (Average Variance Extracted) are calculated for all the outlined constructs. Composite reliability should be more than 0.7 for all the constructs to ensure construct reliability, whereas Cronbach's alpha should be in the range of 0.7–0.95 to ensure indicator reliability (Hair et al., 2019). Both construct and indicator reliability were ensured as required conditions were met (displayed in Table 3). For convergent validity, AVE is calculated for all the constructs, which should be more than 0.5 (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). For all the constructs, AVE was substantially high, ensuring convergent validity.

For analyzing discriminant validity, two approaches can be followed. In the first approach, HTMT ratios are calculated, which should be less than 0.85 for each construct (Henseler et al., 2016). The other approach is given by Fornell and Larcker (1981), which compares the square root of AVE of every construct with the correlations among constructs, where the square root of AVE should be greater.

Table 3. Composite Reliability, AVE, and Outer Loadings.

Constructs	Items	Outer Loadings	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	AVE
Personal factors (PF)	PF1	0.952	0.943	0.943	0.898
	PF2	0.944			
	PF3	0.946			
Educational system constraints in India (EC)	EC1	0.918	0.949	0.950	0.831
	EC2	0.908			
	EC3	0.908			
	EC4	0.911			
	EC5	0.912			
Host country image (CI)	CI1	0.909	0.945	0.947	0.820
	CI2	0.888			
	CI3	0.878			
	CI4	0.867			
	CI5	0.84			
Conducive environment	CE1	0.908	0.927	0.946	0.772
	CE2	0.878			
	CE3	0.898			
	CE4	0.806			
	CE5	0.900			
Institutional factors	IF1	0.860	0.934	0.956	0.683
	IF2	0.838			
	IF3	0.861			
	IF4	0.785			
	IF5	0.797			
	IF6	0.814			
	IF7	0.810			
	IF8	0.841			
Student intention to study abroad	SA1	0.940	0.932	0.932	0.880
	SA2	0.930			
	SA3	0.945			

Both approaches were used to ensure discriminant validity, and satisfactory results were obtained. The result of the first approach is displayed in Table 4, and the Fornell and Larcker approach results are given in Table 5.

Structural Model Analysis

After confirming the reliability and validity of the constructs of the model, path analysis was run to check the specified hypothesis of the research. VIF (Variance

Table 4. HTMT Ratio.

	Conducive Environment	Educational System Constraints	Host Country Image	Institutional Factors	Intention to Study Abroad	Personal Factors
Conducive environment						
Educational system constraints	0.306					
Host country image	0.177	0.563				
Institutional factors	0.468	0.348	0.132			
Intention to study abroad	0.445	0.662	0.638	0.310		
Personal factors	0.378	0.715	0.759	0.171	0.815	

Table 5. Fornell and Larcker Criterion.

	Conducive Environment	Educational System Constraints	Host Country Image	Institutional Factors	Intention to Study Abroad	Personal Factors
Conducive environment	0.879					
Educational system constraints	0.297	0.911				
Host country image	0.147	0.534	0.905			
Institutional factors	0.433	0.339	0.130	0.826		
Intention to study abroad	0.427	0.623	0.601	0.304	0.938	
Personal factors	0.377	0.677	0.718	0.169	0.764	0.947

Inflation Factor) values were assessed to check multicollinearity among constructs, which should be less than 5 for the absence of multicollinearity (Hair et al., 2019). VIF values for all the variables were found to be less than 5. A further bootstrapping technique was used on 5000 sub-samples to test the hypotheses of the research. The results of bootstrapping are displayed in Table 6 and Figure 2.

The coefficient of determination, denoted by R^2 , indicates the variance explained by independent constructs in the dependent construct. The values of R^2 vary between 0 and 1, and values greater than 0.75 are considered substantial, 0.6–0.75 as moderately high, whereas values less than 0.25 are considered weak (Ravand & Baghaei, 2016). In the present research, the model shows moderate to high in-sample predictive accuracy of the model as R^2 is 0.64.

Results of path analysis provided statistical support for all the hypotheses as displayed in Table 6 and Figure 4. Findings concluded that all the push and pull factors affect the student's intention to study abroad. The most influential factor affecting outward student mobility is personal factors ($b = 0.515$, $t = 7.324$, $p = .000$), followed by educational system constraints in India ($b = 0.134$, $t = 2.481$, $p = .013$) and conducive environment ($b = 0.132$, $t = 3.113$, $p = .002$).

Multigroup Analysis

Out of the total 286 students willing to study abroad, 135 reported obtaining quality education as the objective of studying abroad, whereas 151 students reported that their objective to study abroad was migration. The groups were named career-focused students and migration-focused students, respectively. Multigroup analysis was run to compare the groups and identify the determinants of intentions to study abroad for both groups. Table 7 displays the results of two groups, which reveal no significant difference between the groups except for two paths, that is, personal factors and institutional factors. Detailed bootstrapping results were analyzed for both groups. The impact of institutional factors, educational constraints, host country image and conducive environment was found to be significant for career-focused students. The impact of personal factors and a conducive environment was significant for migration-focused students. Hence, the intentions of career-focused students to study abroad are highly influenced by educational system constraints in India, institutional factors, host country image and conducive environment.

Discussion

This research article has contributed to identifying the factors behind the decision-making process of outward student mobility. Following the push-pull approach from the theory of the respective discipline, push and pull factors were identified which determine Indian students' intentions for moving beyond national boundaries for higher education. The first hypothesis states that personal factors have a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad. This is in line with the other studies of Yang (2007), Lee and Morrish (2012), and Mazzoral and

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing.

Hypothesis	Path	Path Coefficient	t Statistics	p Value	Significant (Yes/No)	Decision	R ²
H ₁	Personal factors -> intention to study abroad	0.515	7.324	.00	Yes	Supported	0.64
H ₂	Educational system constraints -> intention to study abroad	0.134	2.481	.013	Yes	Supported	
H ₃	Host country image -> intention to study abroad	0.127	2.671	.008	Yes	Supported	
H ₄	Conducive environment -> intention to study abroad	0.132	3.113	.002	Yes	Supported	
H ₅	Institutional factors -> intention to study abroad	0.097	2.247	.025	Yes	Supported	

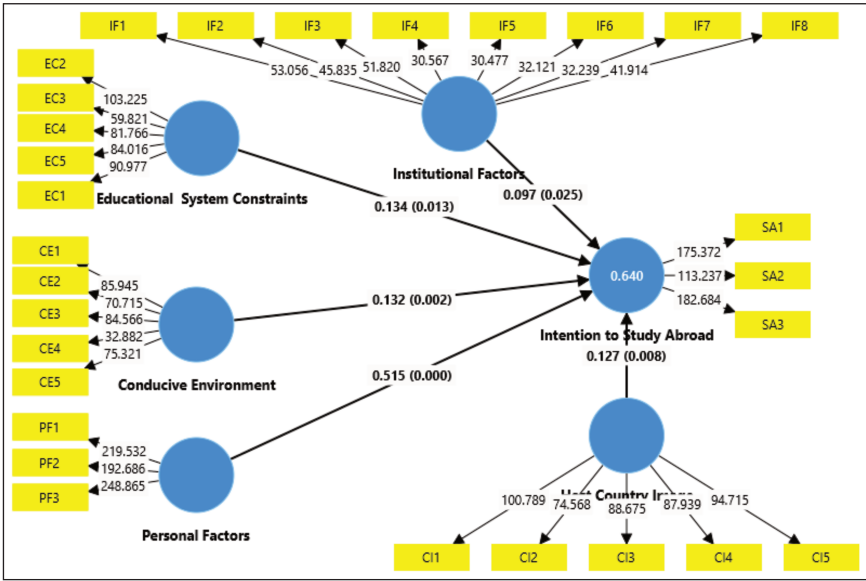


Figure 4. Results of Path Analysis.

Table 7. Results of MGA-PLS Across Career-focused and Migration-focused Students.

Relationships	Path Coefficient (Career-focused)	Path Coefficient (Migration-focused)	Difference	p Value	Decision
PF ->SA	0.094	0.621	-0.527	.000	Moderation
EC ->SA	0.217*	0.079	0.138	.220	No moderation
CI ->SA	0.196*	0.099	0.097	.334	No moderation
IF ->SA	0.285*	0.043	0.242	.029	Moderation
CE ->SAA	0.194*	0.297*	-0.103	.234	No moderation

Note: *p value of path coefficient < 0.01.

Soutar (2002), who have found personal reasons and the influence of others as prominent factors of migrating abroad. Moreover, the parents' support for the students also facilitates the student in taking the migration decision (Sojkin et al., 2012). H_2 proposes that educational system constraints have a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad. This finding confirms the outcomes of previous studies of Mazzoral and Soutar (2002), Agarwal (2011), and Barerah (2018), who have concluded that poor infrastructure and low-quality courses available in India are forcing Indian students to study abroad. Even students prefer to study in a second-grade institution overseas because of higher employment opportunities abroad (Khadria, 2009). H_3 states host country image has a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad. The findings are in line with Cubillo et al. (2006). Many studies have claimed city image as a major influencer

in outward student mobility decisions (Anderson & Bhati, 2012; Cubillo et al., 2006; Rudd et al., 2012).

H_4 postulates that a conducive environment has a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad, as evidenced from the work of previous researchers like Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin (2002), Baas (2006), and Brooks and Waters (2009), who have focused on the conducive environment of the host country as an important factor of influence. The opportunities for earning while learning, high prospects of employment, and income opportunities have been found as prominent factors influencing outward student mobility in earlier studies (Brooks & Waters, 2009; Deumert et al., 2005). H_5 proposes that institutional factors have a significant influence on students' intention to study abroad, which is in confirmation with the studies of Shanka et al. (2006), Sia (2010) and McCarthy et al. (2012).

As far as H_6 is concerned, the desire of students to pursue education in foreign countries seems to go by the perceived division between those with career-oriented goals and those with migration-focused objectives. While students with career-oriented goals usually look for educational opportunities abroad to improve their professional prospects through specialized programs or prestigious institutions, those with migration-focused goals are often motivated by broader aspirations of settling in the host country, gaining international work experience, or accessing pathways to citizenship. Despite these different primary motivations, research shows a significant overlap in the factors influencing their decision to study abroad. A conducive environment of the host country, having good employment opportunities, easy immigration policies, and conducive visa processes, consistently emerges as a crucial consideration for both groups. This indicates that, fundamentally, the appeal of studying abroad depends less on distinct motivations and more on universal factors that enhance educational and career opportunities on a global scale. Therefore, educational institutions and policymakers are encouraged to adopt inclusive strategies that cater to the shared interests of diverse student populations, thereby creating a conducive environment for international education and mobility. The results are in line with the earlier studies of Larsen and Vincent-Lancrin (2002), Baas (2006) and Brooks and Waters (2009).

Implications

The results have not only thrown light on Indian students and their preferred study locations, but they have also given tertiary education providers, government organizations, and policy makers a platform to create plans to draw in Indian international students. The implications of the study have been divided into two categories:

From the Host Country's Perspective

Student mobility abroad has various practical implications for the host country. From an economic perspective, it boosts local economies by generating revenue from tuition fees, accommodation, and daily expenses, which in turn supports

businesses and creates job opportunities across different sectors. On a cultural level, it promotes diversity, leading to a deeper intercultural understanding and global awareness within local communities. In terms of academics, hosting international students elevates the quality of education by introducing diverse viewpoints and talents to institutions, thereby encouraging innovation and research collaborations. Additionally, it bolsters the host country's reputation as a sought-after destination for higher education, attracting skilled individuals and establishing international connections.

In an increasingly globalized world, the pursuit of higher education is no longer confined to national borders. The trend of studying abroad has surged, driven by a myriad of factors that influence students' decisions to seek educational opportunities in foreign countries. Understanding these factors is crucial for universities, policymakers, and stakeholders in the education sector to enhance international student mobility and to tailor programs that meet the aspirations and needs of prospective international students. Given the findings of the article, these can be used as tools by foreign institutional leaders for attracting more Indian students and also for retaining them so as to stand tall in the market. Although career-focused and migration-focused students differ in their primary motivations to study abroad but conducive environment has emerged as a crucial consideration for both segments. Host countries should provide a conducive environment to the prospective students where conducive visa processes, lenient immigration policies and better part-time as well as full-time job opportunities can be provided to attract and retain prospective students (Wickramasekara, 2003). The results are valuable for foreign nations and institutions serving as global study hubs, along with other industry service providers, to enhance their strategies and effectively allocate their resources toward attracting more international students.

From the Perspective of the Indian Government and Academic Institutions

Secondary data analysis has revealed the growth in the number of Indian students going abroad to study. Mishra (2012) has concluded that poor infrastructure and low-quality courses available in India are forcing Indian students to study abroad. Even students prefer to study in a second-grade institution overseas because of higher employment opportunities abroad (Khadria, 2009). Hence, there is a dire need for educational reforms in India. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach, including improving the quality of domestic education, creating attractive opportunities for skilled professionals within the country, and fostering an environment conducive to innovation and growth.

The reservation strategy has made it difficult to get admission in elite national colleges, due to which the students have to move abroad. Encouragement of international institutions to form partnerships and provide cooperative programs with Indian universities is necessary to increase the capacity of Indian education. To prevent students from traveling outside to pursue higher education, more universities comparable to IIMs and IITs could be established. Pupils believe that earning a degree from abroad will lead to improved job opportunities. Under the

direction of industry professionals, the courses ought to be redesigned and reorganized to teach employability-based skills. In addition to making material investments, colleges need to concentrate on fostering academic achievement. In order to end poverty and increase employment opportunities, it is important to encourage students who have studied overseas, particularly those who are interested in science and technology, to return home (Haldorai & Pillai, 2017).

The report of the World Economic Forum (2019) shed light on critical issues within the Indian education system and the perspectives of Indian students and parents regarding overseas education. The report's findings point to a serious issue: the mismatch between the skills that are valued by companies and the abilities that are taught in Indian schools. Many graduates often lose their careers in many fields as a result of this disparity. This circumstance emphasizes the urgent need for educational reforms that bridge the knowledge gap between classroom instruction and the skills required by successful firms. It might be essential to launch programs like experiential learning, industry-academia collaboration, and vocational training to address this problem.

The National Education Policy, 2020, has been the most recent and significant policy development in the field of education. The goal of India's new National Education Policy is to make the nation a destination for students in the area rather than a "sender" nation (Indian Government, Ministry of Human Resource Development, 2020). But the success depends upon its implementation in true spirits.

Conclusion, Limitations and Scope for Future Research

The study has looked into the reasons behind students' decisions to go overseas, including their social networks, study-related issues, personal and family histories, and preferred living locations. The present study's empirical results indicate that the personal factors, educational system constraints in the home country, host country image, conducive environment and institutional factors are important determinants of students' intentions to study abroad.

Nevertheless, the current study has certain limitations. First, the data collected in the study on students moving abroad relies on self-reported information from participants.

This raises the possibility of response bias, in which individuals give replies that are socially acceptable or inaccurately recall their motivations and experiences. Second, the study was confined to students in one country, India. Therefore, there is a need to exercise carefulness when projecting the results to other countries. Findings from studies conducted in one country or region may not be generalizable to other contexts due to variations in educational systems, cultural norms, economic conditions, and immigration policies. Future research might be conducted by taking a sample of students from other nations, also. Third, a sample of north Indian students was used to reach the study's conclusions. Consequently, nationwide data may be used to initiate future studies. Fourth, a sample size of 286 respondents was used for the investigation. While the sample size is adequate,

future research may use a larger sample to reflect upon the determinants of students' intentions to move abroad. For more accurate insights into the problem, future research on this issue should also involve individuals from other nations. Research could also be conducted to explore how the outflow of skilled individuals affects human capital development, innovation, economic growth, and cultural exchange in both contexts.

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