DEMOGRAPHIC AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC CHARACTERISTICS OF STUDENT MIGRATION IN NEPAL

Madhav Bahadur Khapangi
Lecturer, G. P. Koirala Memorial College
madhavkhapangi75@gmail.com

Abstract

Student migration, defined as the movement of students to pursue education abroad for at least a year outside their country of citizenship, has transformed into a market-driven phenomenon due to the globalization of higher education. As the demand for international education surges, an increasing number of students perceive it as a pathway to potential permanent residency. The cultural and economic contributions of these international students have prompted stakeholders to facilitate their entry and integration. While North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and East and Southeast Asia remain primary destinations, emerging educational hubs like Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore are witnessing a rise in international student enrollment. Nepal is a microcosm of this global trend, with thousands of its citizens pursuing higher education abroad annually.

A comprehensive analysis of the demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Nepalese students studying abroad reveals complex patterns influenced by factors such as geographic origin, gender, age, religion, marital status, and economic background. The preference for countries like Japan, characterized by favorable policies and educational opportunities, is particularly pronounced among students from regions like Lumbini and Madesh. These disparities underscore the persistence of sociocultural barriers hindering educational opportunities for women and the inequitable access to international education among students from different socioeconomic strata. To effectively support Nepalese students abroad, it is imperative to develop tailored policies and support systems that address the diverse needs and backgrounds of this population.

Keywords: *Demographic, Socio-economic, Student, Migration, Cost*

1. Introduction

Student migration, characterized by the movement of individuals to pursue higher education in a country other than their country of origin or citizenship for a minimum of twelve months, has evolved into a market-driven phenomenon. This transformation is attributable to the pervasive influence of globalization, which has significantly accelerated the internationalization of higher education. As the global landscape of education expands, a growing number of students are seeking opportunities to study abroad, often perceiving such experiences as potential pathways to permanent residency in their host countries. Recognizing the substantial cultural and economic contributions of international students, key stakeholders have implemented measures to facilitate their arrival and integration into host societies. UNESCO (2015) defines an internationally mobile student as an individual who crosses national borders for educational purposes. A predominant

trend within international education is the migration of students towards established higher education hubs in North America, Europe, Australia, New Zealand, and East and Southeast Asia, including China and Japan. Moreover, emerging educational centers such as Malaysia, the United Arab Emirates, and Singapore are witnessing a surge in international student enrollment. Nepal serves as a microcosm of this global phenomenon, with thousands of its citizens undertaking higher education studies abroad annually. The demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of Nepalese students engaged in international education exhibit intricate patterns influenced by a range of factors, including geographic origin, gender, age, religion, marital status, and economic background. This trend reflects Japan's strategic positioning as a hub for international students through its favorable policies and educational opportunities (Jang, 2019). The significant preference for Japan in provinces like Lumbini (57.1%) and Madesh (77.8%) underscores the targeted internationalization efforts by Japanese institutions (ICEF Monitor, 2019). This disparity highlights persistent socio-cultural barriers that limit educational opportunities for females, despite global trends towards gender equality in education (Brooks & Waters, 2011). The strong male presence in certain countries may also reflect specific professional and technical courses predominantly chosen by male students (Altbach & de Wit, 2020). This age-related preference indicates the appeal of these countries for both undergraduate and postgraduate studies, driven by the quality of education and research opportunities (Altbach, 2016). The association between religious affiliation and study destinations underscores the need for culturally sensitive support systems in host countries (UNESCO, 2015). Highlights the need for family-friendly policies and support services in these countries to cater to the unique needs of married students (OECD, 2020). The economic disparities among students emphasize the need for equitable access to international education (World Bank, 2019). The demographic and socio-economic characteristics of student migration from Nepal are shaped by a complex interplay of provincial origins, gender, age, religious affiliation, marital status, and economic background. These factors collectively influence students' choices and experiences, necessitating tailored policies and support systems to facilitate their academic and personal success abroad.

This movement prompts a need to assess the demographic and socio-economic conditions of migrant students' families. This study examines the demographic characteristics of the survey respondents. This includes basic attributes such as age, gender, religion, and indicators of social stratification like education level, occupation, and income. Analyzing this respondent profile allows for a more refined interpretation of the research findings and facilitates comparisons with the characteristics of the broader population from which the sample was drawn.

2. Data and method

The study utilized a cross-sectional research design, analyzing quantitative data to explore the relationship between the cost of foreign education and remittance. The primary data came from a sampling survey of overseas students from Nepal, focusing on those in ten major host countries: Australia, Japan, the UK, India, China, Canada, the USA, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, and the United Arab Emirates. The findings suggest that investment in foreign education has contributed to an increase in national remittance, though this does not imply a direct return on investment in education. Of the 156 responses collected via a Google Survey on the Cost-Effectiveness Analysis of Student Migration in Nepal, 151 (96.8%) were valid, while 5 respondents (3.2%) chose not to participate.

3. Results and discussion

Geographical distribution of respondents by province and host country: The data shows the distribution of preferences for various countries among respondents from seven provinces in Nepal. Japan is the most preferred destination overall, with the highest percentages across all regions except for Bagmati Province, which stands at 26.1%. In Bagmati Province, the USA follows closely behind Japan with a preference rate of 17.4%.

Table 1: Provincial distribution of respondents by country

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total (%)	Total (N)
Bagmati Province(%)	18.8	14.5	4.3	5.8	26.1	0	1.4	5.8	4.3	17.4	100	67
Gandaki Province(%)	15.8	26.3	5.3	0	31.6	0	0	10.5	5.3	5.3	100	18
Lumbini Province(%)	0	14.3	0	0	57.1	14.3	0	0	0	14.3	100	7
Madesh Province(%)	0	0	0	0	77.8	0	11.1	0	0	11.1	100	9
Kosi Province (%)	21.1	7.9	2.6	0	31.6	0	7.9	7.9	2.6	18.4	100	35
Sudur Paschim Province(%)	22.2	11.1	0	11.1	22.2	0	11.1	0	0	22.2	100	9
Karnali Province	50	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	0	100	6
Total(%)	16.7	12.8	3.2	3.2	31.4	0.6	3.8	5.8	3.2	15.4	100	
Total(N)	26	20	5	5	49	2	6	9	5	24		151

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8, United Arab Emirates=9 and USA=10

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)		
					95 Confidence Interval	
				Significance	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pearson Chi-Square	214.005[a]	66	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Likelihood Ratio	93.269	66	.015	.001[b]	.000	.001
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	83.352			.009[b]	.007	.011
N of Valid Cases	151					

Gandaki Province also strongly prefers Japan (31.6%), but Canada is the second most popular choice with 26.3%. Lumbini Province shows an overwhelming preference for Japan at 57.1%, while in Madesh Province, Japan again leads with 77.8%, followed by a significant preference for

the Republic of Korea at 11.1%. Kosi Province shows a notable interest in both Japan (31.6%) and the USA (18.4%). In Sudur Paschim Province, preferences are more evenly distributed, with significant interest in Japan, the USA, and Australia. Karnali Province shows notable interest in Japan and Australia (50%). The Chi-Square tests indicate significant differences in the distribution of country preferences across provinces, with a Pearson Chi-Square value of 214.005 and a p-value less than 0.001, suggesting that the variations observed are statistically significant.

Gender parity among international students across different nations: The table provides the distribution of respondents by gender across various countries: Female: The data shows that 48 out of 151 respondents (31.8%) identified as female, with notable representation from Australia, Canada, Japan, and the USA.

Table 2: Distribution of respondents by gender across different countries

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Female	29.2	10.4	2.1	4.2	29.2	0	4.2	8.3	4.2	6.3	48
Male	11.7	14.6	3.9	2.9	34	1	3.9	4.9	2.9	20.4	103
Total	16.7	12.8	3.2	3.2	31.4	0.6	3.8	5.8	3.2	15.4	
N	26	20	5	5	49	2	6	9	5	24	151

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8, United Arab Emirates=9 and USA=10

Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)		
				Significance	95 Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pearson Chi-Square	171.007[a]	22	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Likelihood Ratio	59.505	22	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	53.150			.000[b]	.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	151					

Male: A larger proportion of respondents, 103 out of 151 (68.2%), identified as male, with significant representation from India, Japan, and the USA. The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 171.007, p < 0.001) indicate a highly significant association between gender and the country of study, underscoring the varying gender compositions across different educational destinations.

Comparative analysis of respondent age in different countries: In terms of age distribution, the user base across countries exhibits some interesting variations. The younger demographic (Below 25 years) is most prevalent in Japan (20.41%) and Australia (38.46%), whereas it's considerably less common in India (60%) and China (20%).

Table 3: Age-wise distribution of respondents across countries

Age Group	Country										
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total

Below 25	25.64	12.82	2.56	7.69	25.64	0.00	2.56	10.26	5.13	7.69	39
25-29	17.31	17.31	3.85	3.85	30.77	0.00	3.85	3.85	3.85	15.38	52
30-34	13.89	5.56	5.56	0.00	41.67	0.00	5.56	0.00	2.78	25.00	36
35 and above	8.33	16.67	0.00	0.00	33.33	8.33	4.17	12.50	0.00	16.67	24
Total	26	20	5	5	49	2	6	9	5	24	151

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8, United Arab Emirates=9 and USA=10

Conversely, Canada and Japan have the highest proportions in the 25-29 age group (around 17% each). When it comes in their 30s and above, Japan again stands out with the most significant presence (over 47%), followed by Australia (around 19%). Notably, India and China lack users in these older age groups.

Distribution of religious affiliations of international students across countries: The table presents the distribution of respondents by religious affiliation across different countries: Buddhists: 20 respondents (13.2%) identified as Buddhist, with notable representation from India, Japan, and the USA.

Table 4: Distribution of respondents by religious affiliation across different countries

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Buddhist	10	20	0	10	25	0	0	10	15	5	20
Christianity	0	12.5	0	0	37.5	0	25	12.5	0	12.5	8
Hindu	20.2	11.4	2.6	2.6	33.3	0.9	3.5	5.3	1.8	18.4	114
Neutral	0	0	100	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Other	25	0	0	0	50	0	0	0	0	25	7
Total	16.7	12.8	3.2	3.2	31.4	0.6	3.8	5.8	3.2	15.4	
N	26	20	5	5	49	2	6	9	5	24	151

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8, United Arab Emirates=9 and USA=10

Chi-Square Test

				Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)		
			Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)		95 Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
	Value	Df		Significance		
Pearson Chi-Square	199.723[a]	55	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Likelihood Ratio	86.509	55	.004	.000[b]	.000	.000
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	94.716			.000[b]	.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	151					

Christianity: Among the respondents, 8 individuals (5.3%) identified as Christians, primarily from Canada, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and the USA. Hindu: The largest group, comprising 114 respondents (75.5%), identified as Hindus, prominently from Australia, Canada, Japan, and the USA. Neutral: A minimal proportion, 2 respondents (1.3%), identified as having no religious

affiliation. Other: Seven respondents (4.6%) identified with other religions, with significant representation from Australia, Japan, and the USA. The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 199.723, p < 0.001) indicate a highly significant association between religious affiliation and the country of study, highlighting the diverse religious backgrounds of respondents across different educational destinations.

Marital status of international students by country of study: The table presents the distribution of respondents by marital status across different countries: Divorced: A very small proportion of respondents, 2 individuals (1.3%), reported being divorced, all from the UK.

Table 5: Distribution of respondents by marital status across different countries

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Divorced	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	100	0	0	2
Married	10	10	0	0	41.4	1.4	5.7	8.6	2.9	20	70
Single	27.3	18.2	9.1	0	22.7	0	0	4.5	4.5	13.6	22
Unmarried	22.8	15.8	5.3	8.8	26.3	0	3.5	1.8	3.5	12.3	57
Total	16.7	12.8	3.2	3.2	31.4	0.6	3.8	5.8	3.2	15.4	
N	26	20	5	5	49	2	6	9	5	24	151

Sources: Field Survey, 2022
*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8, United Arab Emirates=9 and USA=10

Chi-Square Test

			Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)		
					95 Confidence Interval	
	Value	Df		Significance	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pearson Chi-Square	271.249[a]	44	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Likelihood Ratio	92.506	44	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	88.469			.000[b]	.000	.000
N of Valid Cases	151					

Married: The largest group, comprising 70 respondents (46.4%), identified as married, with significant representation from Japan, Australia, and the USA. Single: Twenty-two respondents (14.6%) reported being single, primarily from Australia, Canada, and Japan. Unmarried: The remaining 57 respondents (37.7%) identified as unmarried, with notable representation from Japan, Australia, and the USA). The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 271.249, p < 0.001) indicate a highly significant association between marital status and the country of study, highlighting the diversity in marital statuses among respondents across different educational destinations.

Family socio-economic background

The socio-economic background of the family refers to the combined social and economic position of a family unit within a given society. This encompasses several key factors; social status and economic status.

Distribution of annual family income among international students: The table presents the distribution of respondents' family average annual incomes across various countries: Less than NPR 5 Lakhs: The highest proportion of respondents (72 out of 151, 47.7%) reported family

incomes below NPR 5 Lakhs, with significant representation from Australia, Canada, Japan, and the USA. NPR 5-10 Lakhs: Approximately 46 respondents (30.5%) fell within this income bracket, with notable contributions from Australia, Japan, and the USA. NPR 10-15 Lakhs: This category was reported by 15 respondents (9.9%), primarily from Australia, Canada, Japan, and the Republic of Korea. Above NPR 15-25 Lakhs: 18 respondents (11.9%) indicated family incomes between NPR 15-25 Lakhs, with notable representation from Australia, Canada, and the USA.

Table 6: Distribution of the family's annual income

Country	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	Total
Less than NPR 5 Lakhs	9.3	9.3	7	4.7	44.2	0	4.7	2.3	4.7	14	72
NPR 5-10 Lakhs	17.2	10.3	3.4	0	34.5	0	0	6.9	0	24.1	46
NPR 10-15 Lakhs	26.7	20	0	0	20	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	6.7	15
Above NPR 15-25 Lakhs	18.2	18.2	0	0	9.1	0	9.1	9.1	9.1	27.3	18
T	16.7	12.8	3.2	3.2	31.4	0.6	3.8	5.8	3.2	15.4	
N	26	20	5	5	49	2	6	9	5	24	151

Sources: Field Survey, 2022
*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8, United Arab Emirates=9 and USA=10

Chi-Square Test

	Value	Df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)	Monte Carlo Sig. (2-sided)		
				Significance	95 Confidence Interval	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Pearson Chi-Square	209.494[a]	77	.000	.000[b]	.000	.000
Likelihood Ratio	96.950	77	.062	.017[b]	.014	.019
Fisher-Freeman-Halton Exact Test	89.511			.017[b]	.015	.020
N of Valid Cases	151					

The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 209.494, p < 0.001) indicate a statistically significant association between family average annual income and the country of study, underscoring substantial variations in economic backgrounds across different educational destinations.

Distribution of annual income respondents' family by province: This table presents the distribution of annual income across the seven provinces of Nepal. The data is categorized into income brackets ranging from less than NPR 3 Lakhs to above NPR 25 Lakhs. Bagmati Province: Exhibits the highest proportion of individuals falling within the highest income bracket (above NPR 25 Lakhs) at 1.99%. Additionally, a significant portion of the population falls within the NPR 3-10 Lakhs brackets, indicating a relatively balanced income distribution compared to other provinces.

Table 7: Distribution of annual income by province

Province	Annual Income	Grand Total

	Above NPR 25 Lakhs	Less than NPR 3 Lakhs	NPR 10-15 Lakhs	NPR 15-25 Lakhs	NPR 3-5 Lakhs	NPR 5-7 Lakhs	NPR 7-10 Lakhs	
Bagmati Province	1.99	11.26	4.64	3.31	8.61	7.28	7.28	44.37
Gandaki Province	0.66	6.62	0.00	0.00	2.65	0.00	1.99	11.92
Karnali Province	0.00	1.99	0.00	1.32	0.00	0.66	0.00	3.97
Koshi Province	0.66	7.28	2.65	1.32	4.64	4.64	1.99	23.18
Lumbini Province	0.00	0.00	1.32	0.00	1.32	0.00	1.99	4.64
Madesh Province	0.66	0.66	0.66	0.66	1.99	0.66	0.66	5.96
Sudur Paschim Province	0.66	0.66	0.66	0.66	0.00	2.65	0.66	5.96
Grand Total	4.64	28.48	9.93	7.28	19.21	15.89	14.57	100.00

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

Gandaki Province, Karnali Province, and Lumbini Province: Demonstrate a lower overall income level compared to Bagmati Province. These provinces have a larger share of the population concentrated in the lowest income bracket (less than NPR 3 Lakhs). Sudur Paschim Province and Madhesh Province: Also have a lower income level with a larger share in the bottom two brackets. However, unlike the aforementioned provinces, the income distribution appears more concentrated, with a smaller middle-income segment (NPR 3-10 Lakhs). Koshi Province: Falls somewhere in between Bagmati Province and the aforementioned low-income provinces. It has a slightly higher proportion of individuals in the higher income brackets compared to the latter group

Analysis of annual family expenditure for international students: The table explores the annual expenditure of respondent families across various ranges. Families in Nepal supporting students in the United States and Australia exhibit the highest propensity for exceeding annual spending of NPR 25 Lakhs (50%).

Table 8: Distribution of the family's annual expenditure by countries

Annual expenditure	Country										Total
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	
Above NPR 25 Lakhs	50.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	50.00	100.00
Less than NPR 3 Lakhs	10.29	8.82	4.41	4.41	39.71	1.47	0.00	8.82	2.94	19.12	100.00
NPR 10-15 Lakhs	30.00	10.00	0.00	0.00	20.00	10.00	0.00	0.00	10.00	20.00	100.00

NPR 15-25 Lakhs	0.00	0.00	33.33	0.00	66.67	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.00	100.00
NPR 3-5 Lakhs	22.50	15.00	2.50	0.00	32.50	0.00	7.50	2.50	0.00	17.50	100.00
NPR 5-7 Lakhs	20.00	20.00	0.00	0.00	33.33	0.00	13.33	6.67	6.67	0.00	100.00
NPR 7-10 Lakhs	23.08	30.77	0.00	15.38	0.00	0.00	7.69	7.69	7.69	7.69	100.00
Total	17.22	13.25	3.31	3.31	32.45	1.32	3.97	5.96	3.31	15.89	100.00

Sources: Field Survey, 2022

*Australia=1, Canada=2, China=3, India=4, Japan=5, New Zealand=6, Republic of Korea=7, UK=8

Conversely, families supporting students in India, China, and the Republic of Korea demonstrate the lowest propensity for exceeding this threshold (all at 0%). Among the respondents whose families reside in Nepal, a significant proportion supporting children studying in Japan (39.71%), India, and China (4.41%) have an annual expenditure below NPR 3 Lakhs.

Discussion: The data reveals significant trends and variations in the preferences of students from different provinces in Nepal for studying abroad. Japan emerges as the most preferred destination overall, with notable percentages across all provinces except Bagmati, where the USA follows closely behind Japan (26.1% vs. 17.4%). This finding aligns with the broader global trend of increasing student mobility towards East Asian countries, notably Japan, which has actively promoted itself as a hub for international students (ICEF Monitor, 2019). For instance, Gandaki Province has a strong inclination towards Japan (31.6%), but also shows a significant preference for Canada (26.3%). Lumbini Province displays an overwhelming preference for Japan (57.1%), while Madesh Province follows with a significant preference for Japan (77.8%) and the Republic of Korea (11.1%). These findings are consistent with literature suggesting that economic opportunities and educational quality in Japan and South Korea are key attractors for students from South Asian countries (Altbach & de Wit, 2020). The Chi-square tests indicate significant differences in the distribution of country preferences across provinces (Pearson Chi-Square = 214.005, p < 0.001), suggesting that these variations are statistically significant. This underscores the need for tailored policies and support systems for students from different regions of Nepal (UNESCO, 2015). The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 171.007, p < 0.001) highlight a significant association between gender and the country of study. This gender

disparity is reflective of broader socio-cultural dynamics that influence educational migration, where males often have more opportunities and family support for studying abroad (Brooks & Waters, 2011). These findings suggest that Japan attracts a diverse age group of international students, which may be attributed to its wide range of academic programs and research opportunities (Jang, 2019). The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 199.723, p < 0.001) indicate a significant association between religious affiliation and the country of study, reflecting the diverse religious backgrounds of respondents across different educational destinations (Altbach, 2016). This highlights the importance of considering marital status when analyzing international student demographics, as it can influence the choice of destination and the support systems required (OECD, 2020). The Chi-square test results (Pearson Chi-Square = 209.494, p < 0.001) indicate significant variations in economic backgrounds across different

educational destinations. This underscores the need for financial support and scholarships for students from lower-income families (World Bank, 2019).

4. Conclusion: The distribution of respondents by province across different countries reveals significant preferences among Nepalese students for studying abroad, with Japan being the most favored destination overall. This preference is evident across all regions except for Bagmati Province, where the USA closely follows Japan in popularity. The Chi-square tests indicate statistically significant variations in country preferences across provinces, underscoring the diversity in choices among students from different regions. Gender distribution analysis shows a higher proportion of male respondents, particularly favoring Japan and the USA, with significant gender-based differences in country preferences. Age-wise, younger students predominantly choose Japan and Australia, while older age groups are more prevalent in Japan and Australia. Religious affiliation and marital status also show significant associations with study destinations, reflecting diverse backgrounds and needs. Additionally, the socio-economic background analysis highlights substantial variations in family incomes and expenditures, further influencing students' choices. These findings provide valuable insights for developing targeted strategies to support Nepalese students in their international education pursuits. The data highlights the complex interplay of factors influencing the preferences and demographics of Nepalese students studying abroad. These findings provide valuable insights for policymakers and educational institutions to develop targeted strategies to support international students, considering their diverse backgrounds and needs.

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