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International Educational Consultancies and Students Migration from Nepal

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Abstract

An increasing number of Nepali students are going abroad each year for further studies. The recent trend is more of going for further studies at the undergraduate level rather than the previous patterns of going for graduate and postgraduate research degrees. These students often take the support of educational consultancies to facilitate their recruitment for international education. Along with this, there is a parallel increment of international educational consultancies in motivating and facilitating students to go abroad for further studies. In essence, these students who take the help of such brokering agencies often go on a “student visa”. Ethnographic information acquired from the field study conducted in Kathmandu Valley is the fundamental basis of the development of this article. Interviews and observations were the main techniques through which information was collated which were later on thematically analyzed to reach the conclusions of this study. These agencies have devised various strategies to recruit and convince students about the value and significance of international education. This article also highlights that these educational consulting firms are thriving in Nepal in a liberal economic context vis-à-vis the unhindered power of the globalization process.

Keywords: International Education, Globalization, Brokering, Student Visa, Nepal

Introduction

An increasing number of Nepali students move to different international educational destinations every year contributing significantly to the economy of Nepal. We can see the photographic images, and information of these aspiring international students once they are in the Tribhuvan International Airport (TIA). Often their parents, friends, or relatives pose their photographs portraying an achievement of landmark success in their life. These days Nepali newspapers and social media are covered not only the pros and cons of migration of Nepali youths as international students abroad but also the advertorials of

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International Educational Consultancies (IECs) offering different services to facilitate them to go abroad.

Going abroad for higher education is not new in Nepal. Many Nepali, mainly the high caste and male went to Baranasi and other Indian towns and cities for their studies not only during the Rana regime but even after the establishment of the multiparty democratic system in Nepal in 2007 B.S. Lack of educational institutions and facilities in Nepal can be considered as the fundamental cause behind this mobility of Nepali. We can consider this kind of international educational mobility as the first wave of international migration for higher studies. This also coincides with the first wave of migration and mobility of Nepali in search of work which began in the 18th and 19th centuries due to the predatory state policies and agrarian changes which forced peasants mainly in the hills to move out of their land and look for their livelihoods also outside of the country (Regmi, 1999). Along with the increasing opportunities in cities and towns and the establishment of a multiparty democratic system again in the country, the second wave of migration augmented in the 1990s.

Along with and pushed by the Maoist insurgency in the late 1990s, it multiplied, creating space for the establishment and flourishing of numerous brokering agencies and agents to facilitate their migration of Nepali youths and adults to new destinations in Europe, USA, Australia and other developed countries. The education migration accelerated phenomenally after 2000 along with the increment of IECs, and the undeniable power of commoditization of globalization of education (Bassett, 2006) and the ‘academic capitalism’ (Ball, 2012) at the international sphere. In line with what we have witnessed in Nepal, student migration is still increasing at a global scale as well there were 2 million international students in 2000 whereas it reached over 6.3 million in 2020 (IOM, 2022).

Acharya (2012) have studied the trends and causes of Nepali student migration exploring their aspirations and expectation to leave their family and parents to go abroad. Not only Acharya, this kind of study often comes up with a long list of push and pull factors behind this process. Taking departure from such conventional tradition of looking at the causes of migration, this paper regards the student recruitment agencies facilitating to go abroad for higher studies as an eminent phenomenon itself worthy of study and discussion. Therefore, in this paper, I aim to portray the author’s understanding and analysis of these IECs, how they operate in the international student recruitment landscape, how these brokering agencies reflect upon their works and what are the perceptions of the aspiring international migrating students and their parents and relatives. Equipped with

the ethnographic data, this article explores the meaning and strategies behind the process of recruitment of international students in Nepal.

Research Question and Objectives

The main thrust of this article is to comprehend the transnational movement of people. The primary research question of the study based on which this paper is formulated was to measure the features and key facets of recruitment agencies, which “facilitate” migration of international students from Nepal. This study was conducted to have enhanced knowledge of how these agencies function. The primary objectives of this paper are to:

- a. Understand the key characteristics of international educational consultancy agencies,
- b. Analyze the kinds of services these agencies offer to the potential students visiting them, and
- c. Examine the context and pattern of emergence of these brokering agencies and how to visualize them in the broader spectrum of the contemporary form of globalization.

While attempting to address such questions, this paper also looks at how brokering agencies view/perceive potential migrants, what factors contribute the migrants to choosing a particular brokering agency as well as look for whether there are any strategies these brokering agencies devise to attract their clients and facilitate migration of Nepali students.

Research Design and Methods

This article is developed from the data derived from the study conducted to approach both the educational consultancies and the migrant recruitment agencies that provide support to migrate Nepali students out of Nepal. The ethnographic study carried out during December 2009-March 2010 in Dilli Bazaar, Bag bazaar and Putali Sadak area is not only the source of substantial information for this paper but also raised my curiosity perpetually in this social realm. To grasp fundamental features of this social realm, the study employed mainly the primary method of data collection. An ethnographic fieldwork was carried out in Kathmandu Valley to understand how international educational consultancies function in Nepal. In-depth interviews were conducted both with the people who operate or work with ‘international educational consultancies’ and with the ‘potential migrants’ who

hoped to go abroad for further education. In this ethnographic fieldwork, I spent several days visiting different consultancies in Kathmandu and participating in recruitment seminars. It also involved spending time with potential students somewhere inside their office or nearby café and tea stalls. The researcher observed the setting of the agencies, the interaction of the agency personnel with their clients and the way potential migrants unveil their self in their interactions among themselves and with the recruitment agencies.

The researcher also visited the IECs and associations of the agencies and interviewed the people operating/working agencies, with their clients, the potential migrants, and officials of the associations of the agencies mainly about the various aspects of student mobility at the transnational level. In addition to primary data, the study collected already available records, data and media reports on the issue of recruitment agencies. The thematic analysis approach helped the researcher to seek the priori themes and grounded themes. Likewise, the researcher also made the content analysis of the documents collected from the secondary sources. The researcher upholds the highest form of ethical compliance in selecting the research participants, in his conversations with these fully informed participants and while doing observation in the field.

Flourishing International Educational Consultancies

There are a number of IECs on both sides of the road as one travels from Dilli bazaar to Bag bazaar. Signboards belonging to multiple agencies are visible hanging in the same location. Nearly all of them send students to various locations across the globe, particularly to colleges and universities in industrialized nations like the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, Japan, Germany, the Russian Federation, and so forth. Out of 6.3 million international students, these are the nations that drew one-third of them in 2020 (IOM, 2022). Additionally, the IECs print their flyers and pamphlets on glossy paper in an effort to wow pupils. This is the location where the older computer and language institutes gave rise to these IECs in the late 1990s (Adhikari, 2007). The growing market had established a new service industry for computer training and teaching English to jobseekers that want to appear trendy and work for international corporations and NGOs. Adhikari continues by saying that they were forced to pursue IEC business due to the growing rivalry in and declining business of computer and language teaching.

These young, well-educated Nepalese from the middle class are able to travel overseas thanks to IECs. IECs assist individuals in preparing official documents such as acceptance letters for courses from foreign universities or colleges, help with bank statement

preparation, offer advice on how to prepare for interviews and visas, help with English language preparation, and prepare reports for police and charter accountants. The field study revealed that the processing charge that an applicant must pay is approximately Rs. 10,000/-. Even in the unlikely event that the applicant is denied a visa, this money will not be reimbursed. The applicant must pay an additional processing cost of approximately Rs. 15,000/-if they are granted a visa. The entire cost often varies between Rs. 4,00,000 and Rs. 10,00,000, depending on the fees that must be paid to the college/university. These IECs assist youth in going outside and funnel money for their studies.

These IECs have tasteful furnishings and décor, and attractive young women are stationed at the front desk. When interacting with prospective international students, these younger receptionists are either fluent in English or often employ English vocabulary. They are ready to assist the guest independently or to refer them to the appropriate authorities. Counselors at these IECs assist students in obtaining a "student visa" and provide advice on other facets of studying abroad. The majority of agencies have hung a global map on their wall that is visible to guests and illustrates the connections between Nepal and many developed nations. Numerous organizations have inserted photocopies of the visas of various successful students who have already been overseas through that specific agency in order to impress the students and offer evidence that they have been successful in helping "facilitate" students' travels. The US, UK, Australia, Germany, France, and Russian Federation flags are among the destination nation's featured on the IECs' billboards and banners.

To attract many students these IECs attractively present the study abroad program. Speaking with the IEC counselors, it is discovered that those academic programs that permit students to work and bring their spouses or dependents along are highly sought after. To draw in students, IECs are providing programs that, once completed, will enable students to find employment. Freshships, scholarships, and studentships are further means by which the IECs tempt students to study overseas. Offering students the opportunity to become permanent residents (PR) is another successful strategy for drawing in students. Many young people wishing to permanently leave the nation want to travel overseas using their PR.

To help students who lack the necessary English language proficiency to score well on the TOEFL, IELTS, and other English language tests, IECs have been connecting students with colleges and universities that either do not require a TOEFL or IELTS score, or that offer different substitutes like learning English concurrently with an academic program. It

also shows that Western colleges and universities are catering to students who are able to pay but lack the skills required for higher international degrees. Taking into account what is actually happening in the South, these educational establishments are also operating in order to broaden their market. A great deal of students have been made very clear that when they are in and have finished the necessary formalities at the university or college, all they need to do is pay fees on a periodic basis and on schedule to be able to remain in that nation for the duration of their program. After earning their degree, individuals must be admitted into another program in order to extend their stay on a student visa if they are unable to make other arrangements. Since neither the students nor the academic institutions are making the necessary arrangements for study, they are both in a win-win situation while they pursue their individual objectives. Many colleges and universities offer students convincing documentation to obtain a visa; these establishments lack stringent policies on student attendance as long as they make on-time payment of fees. Students in Nepal refer to these colleges as "Hajariya College" - thousand pounds college- (Adhikari, 2007). All these universities did was assist students in obtaining and maintaining student visas.

IECs underline that they have programs available in the US, Europe, and Australia. They make claims about a better success rate at getting visas in order to draw in students. In Cyprus, professional and vocational courses typically have greater visa success rates. They have been reiterating that Cyprus is in Europe since some people may be ignorant of its exact location. To do this, they employ bold lettering and a larger font size at the top of their paper promotions, followed by smaller fonts that describe the programs. They have been coming up with the same plan while promoting the study in the recently admitted Eastern European nations to the European Union. One of the EU/Shenzhen countries' visa success rates is highlighted in this advertisement. IECs underline that they have programs available in the US, Europe, and Australia. They make claims about a better success rate at getting visas in order to draw in students. In Cyprus, professional and vocational courses typically have greater visa success rates. They have been reiterating that Cyprus is in Europe since it is possible that some people are ignorant of its exact location. To do this, they employ bold lettering and a larger font size at the top of their paper promotions, followed by smaller fonts that describe the programs. They have been coming up with the same plan while promoting the study in the recently admitted Eastern European nations to the European Union. One of the EU/Shenzhen countries' visa success rates is highlighted in this advertisement. Sometimes referred to as gateways to Europe, these countries indicate that students can go anywhere on the continent, mostly to Western Europe, where obtaining a visa is more of a challenge than in these Eastern European countries.

Students have been promised that they will be able to find various ways to speed their advancement within a few years because the West has been portrayed as the land of opportunities. They stress to the children that, like other Nepalese are discovering in the West, they are bound to have enormous prospects if they are wise, competent, and clever enough. They make an effort to instill interest in the students. Meanwhile, they emphasize that if they are unable to gain these prospects, it is not because the country of choice lacks them, instead it is the student's own fault, signifying that he is either incompetent, not intelligent enough, or simply unfortunate.

Traveling overseas on a student visa has become so typical that advertisements for bachelor's degrees, A-level programs, and O-level programs are featured in Nepali media with the message that by pursuing this specific academic path, students will be able to travel, gain admission to a foreign university, or even finish that specific degree in the US, Australia, or Canada through credit transfer. One notable illustration of the impact of this credit transfer technique is the sharp drop in enrollment in Nepalese universities' BBA programs from those enrolled in the first to the fourth year. One of the most appealing features these programs can provide for students is the ability to transfer credits.

The highlighted message found in advertisements for academic programs in the Philippines, Singapore, and other Asian countries states that students who enroll in these programs will be able to transfer their credits to universities in the US and Europe, obtain employment in the West, or at the very least, their college or university will be recognized by and affiliated with one of the US or European universities. This demonstrates how these Eastern academic institutions are tainting public opinion of Western academic institutions and perpetuating the notion that one must eventually relocate to the West in order to pursue a better job and way of life.

For the majority of students who apply through IECs, being accepted into a university in one of the most sought-after Western nations serves as a passport to the West. Strong views on this are held by Mr. Hari Bahadur, a counseling officer of a consultancy based in the Ghantaghar area that specializes in sending pupils to Canada. He gave me permission to remain in his office while the prospective candidates received counseling. In addition to emphasizing the need for a visa to travel overseas during the counseling session, all nine of the students who had previously attended indicated that they would like to obtain a "student visa." With the exception of one, all of these students were more interested in applying to programs in which they would be admitted than in taking any specific type of academic course. A little girl was there among the nine hopefuls, accompanied by her

boy-friend who had recently returned from Denmark due to her boy-friend's reluctance to travel there as a dependent. She is eager to visit Canada in the hopes that she would be able to bring her boy buddy along or extend an offer to him once she gets there.

In order to persuade Embassy authorities that they can afford the tuition and living expenses for the duration of their studies, educational consulting firms additionally recommend that candidates enroll for the right program at an institution with a modest cost structure. All of the counselors I have spoken with believe that while academic success at home institutions is important for gaining admission overseas, it is not a guarantee of obtaining a visa. Based on their twenty-plus years of expertise, Mr. Hari considers that the applicant's economic situation is the most crucial factor when securing a visa. They convince the students to present their financial picture in a way that is reasonable given the Nepalese economic environment—that is, neither excessively high nor low. The advisors instruct them on how to create quality documentation.

Occasionally, the policies of the country of destination make it difficult to obtain the necessary documentation, which inevitably poses an obstacle to emigration. Before the Embassy decided to accept bank statements from all commercial banks, gaining an Australian visa was simpler. However, the Australian Embassy chose in 2009 to only accept statements from two banks, which has made it harder for several consultancies to help create "right" bank statements.

As per the account of IEC officials, wealthy countries' embassies often change their visa regulations; at times, they make it simpler to obtain a visa, and at other times, they make it more difficult. They argue that this is not because embassies have authority over the visa application process; rather, they are acting in accordance with national requirements. They loosen the visa requirements whenever they require additional labourers or manpower, and they enforce strict policies otherwise. Referencing the 2010 UK government decision to bar any Nepalese students from entering the country, Mr. Hari believes that the UK's rebound from the downturn is due to the growing number of international students, mainly the south Asians. He predicts that if it becomes apparent that they need more laborers, they will open their border. The National Educational Consultancies Association (NECA) website lists the suspension of the visa due to a decrease in the number of Nepalese students, while the UKBA website (2010) lists irregularities linked to the application procedure as a further cause for the suspension.

IECs view students as a subset of emigrants who wish to leave the nation in search of better chances. They are aware that the majority of these students, who are travelling

overseas due to lack of family or personal funds, plan to remain there after their studies. As a result, the student visa route has been seen as an intermediary used by immigrants to find legal entry points into their new country. It suggests—and is generally known—that the individual is just travelling with a student visa and is not genuinely attending school. It has been developed as a way to obtain a “student visa” by many other students who aspire to go abroad.

Individuals from middle-class to upper-middle-class families come to IECs for travel assistance. These individuals, who are represented through IECs' agents or branch offices, are from different areas of Nepal. Until about fifteen years ago, the Kathmandu Valley and a few other cities comprised the majority of likely migrants. Today's potential migrants are arriving from many locations, including Pokhara, Chitawan, Butwal, Jhapa, and so on, along with the expansion of urban centers and commercial activity in other parts of the nation. These developments resulted in a spike in the wealth of the residents of these neighbourhoods. An IEC representative in Ghantaghar connected this scenario to rising land prices and people's affordability. The parents can now afford to send their kids overseas thanks to this.

Realizing how important it was for an organization to grow and protect educational consulting in Nepal in line with the increase in IECs and target nations, the Educational Consultancy Association of Nepal (ECAN) formed on August 29, 1997. It strives to help parents and students who wish to send their kids overseas for more education by offering them the right information, direction, and counseling. The definition of educational consulting is giving advice to students who want to attend domestic, international, or foreign universities and colleges. 2009 saw the organization of the third ECAN educational fair, which was themed "Gateway to the world education." ECAN started publishing a newsletter in August 2009, which covers information about several global educational destinations alongside the ECAN members' code of conduct (ECAN 2009). Apart from the broad code of conduct that all IECs must adhere to, it defines the matters concerning advertisements in a different section. In light of the association's strength, more IEC associations have begun to set up.

International Education, Globalization, and Migration

Making decisions within the particular social, political and economic context, people decide to stay inside the country or go abroad as per their choice. Through such acts of choice, they are constructing their self. By choosing to go particular country they

are demonstrating their socio-cultural-political-economic status. Through their choice, they portray what kind of life and lifestyle they deserve in their life and society. By choosing the destination country and sometimes a particular kind of occupation, as symbolic interactionists Mead and Cooley (c.f. Ritzer, 2000) argue, these migrants are construing their self and furnishing their identities. During this furnishing, they pay attention to how they appear in the eyes of their significant others. That is why on top of career development, earning opportunities, and higher living standards, migration to select developed countries in the global North becomes a matter of pride not only for the migrating students but also for the family members at home.

Along with the increase in international migration, IECs are established in different places. The locations of the offices of the IEC are also often strategically selected to affect their potential clients. Earlier, most of the IECs were located in the Bag Bazaar and Putalisadak areas, which lie not only at the centre of Kathmandu but many colleges are found in and around these areas. To inform prospective international students know and impress them about their product and to go abroad with different prospects and offers, IECs have been found to concentrate there. Along with the expansion of colleges, especially the private colleges, into the outer skirts of the city, several IECs are established in the new locations.

The process of territorial expansion of IECs has been augmented by the proliferation of the residential areas around and outside the ring road of Kathmandu. This is not only the effect of the proliferation of residential areas beyond the ring road, instead it has been a simultaneous process of increase of urbanization in these areas. Subsequently, the IECs were set up in new areas like Kalanki, Kalimati, Gongabu, Balazu, Koteshwor, Baneshwor, and Satdobato. Besides this, from the last decade onwards, IECs have begun to run their branches in different cities such as Biratnagar, Pokhara, Narayangadh/Bharatpur, and Nepalgunj. In addition to the permanent setting up of the branches and agencies, occasionally, IECs run mobile recruitment programs in different cities and are often accompanied by the representative of the potential colleges/Universities.

The IECs located in the Least Developed Countries (LDCs) act as agencies of the higher education institutions and eventually support the employers in the North to promote and expand their competitiveness in the global capitalistic system. For the employers and the destination countries, these Agencies are supporting in getting cheap labour and relief from the existing labour act, which is not equally favorable for the foreign employees. In this way, global capitalism is penetrating the global periphery and extracting not only the financial capital but also the surplus labour (Frank, 1967; Wallerstein, 1974). The

increment of IECs can be regarded as a result of capitalistic development in fewer areas at the cost of larger areas on the global scale and they have become the vehicle of promoting 'academic capitalism' (Ball, 2012) at the world scale.

Conclusions

In this globalized world, international student migration has emerged as inevitable (Acharya, 2012). Youths look for opportunities wherever they are in the world. Understanding the process of their recruitment and migration will be beneficial to comprehend the migration phenomenon holistically which will eventually open up to promote their welfare, not only during the process of migration but also even after the departure. Uneven development at the world system level has created a lucrative environment for the youths in the international market. Thus, international student migration has emerged as the other facet of labor migration.

In contrary to the seemingly fundamental principle of globalization- the declining barriers of crossing the border and thus the emergence of the borderless society- the reality is quite different. That is, the complexity associated with the border crossing demands the creation and acceleration of a brokering agency, with the payment of consulting fees, to cross the national boundary. The complexity associated with the border crossing has paved the way for the flourishing of the IEC market. The value addition they provide with the package of facilitating the border crossing through higher education, they get the legitimacy to charge money and have emerged as the new 'compradors' in developing countries (Hulme et al, 2014).

The increasing trend of youngsters going abroad on "student visas" makes us think critically at least in two directions. One, students are looking for learning and earning opportunities and the government and higher educational institutions in Nepal have to think about how to provide such opportunities within Nepal, so that Nepal does not lose the productive youth force. On the other hand, labour migration in developed countries for Nepali nationals is not easy, making them to go through the round way of "student visa". Eventually this increases the cost of migration as well and the students have to pay huge amounts of money in the name of tuition fees, due to restricted working hours for the Students. Moreover, such migrants on "student visa" cannot focus solely on work, they often have to worry about the next visa renewal.

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