



The evolving landscape of Higher Education in India and the growing trend of Indian students studying in foreign universities, causes, opportunities and challenges

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Abstract:

The landscape of higher education is undergoing significant transformation, driven by globalization, technological advancements, and shifting economic dynamics. This paper examines the growing trend of Indian students pursuing higher education at foreign universities, exploring the factors contributing to this shift and the evolving landscape of global education. With increasing aspirations for world-class academic experiences, enhanced career prospects, and exposure to diverse cultural settings, Indian students are increasingly seeking opportunities beyond national borders. The paper highlights the key drivers, such as the perception of better quality education, international job opportunities, and the increasing availability of scholarships and financial aid, that have led to this migration trend. It also discusses the challenges and implications of this trend for both India and the host countries, including the brain drain phenomenon, the impact on domestic higher education institutions, and the changing dynamics of global student mobility. By examining statistical trends, student experiences, and institutional responses, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the evolving patterns in international higher education and their long-term implications on both global and national education systems.

Key words: Higher education, foreign universities, student mobility, Global education trends

Introduction:

There is a great shift in India's education system. The National and the State policies are not only envisaging the primary and the secondary education but there is a huge scope for Higher Education. The education system in general and Higher education in particular is witnessing a phenomenal growth in many

aspects such as its enrolment, institutional capacity, teacher-student ratio, etc. The rapid expansion of the higher education system has brought up several relevant issues related to equity, efficiency, and access to higher education. According to the latest statistics based on the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) there are 1,168 universities, 45,473 colleges, and 12,002 stand-alone institutions in India. This is evident that our country is steadily progressing in the field of education. In spite of this immense expansion in Higher Education in India, the young population aspires to pursue their higher education in foreign universities. The number of Indian students pursuing higher education abroad has significantly increased, as of 2021 statistics, 4.45 lakh Indian students went abroad for higher education, a significant increase from the pandemic-affected 2020 (2.59 lakh). The top destinations were the USA, which received 1.25 lakh students, and Canada, which received 1.02 lakh students. The number of students in 2021 grew by 41% from the previous year, with a continued upward trend.

This growing trend of Indian students migrating to other developed countries to pursue higher education are driven by various interlinked factors or causes:

- **The ranking system of the Universities:** The ranking of the universities are done at National and global level by the reputed organisations like; The Times Higher Education (THE), The Academic Ranking World Universities (ARWU) based on criteria like the academic excellence, Scope for advanced research activities and facilities, the qualification and reputation of faculty, student-pupil ratio and selective admissions, specialization expertise, student options, number of awards received by the institution, the affiliation and the accreditation, student success and placement options, industrial linkages, historical reputation and other criteria. These factors are then combined to generate a score, and universities are ranked from highest to lowest based on these scores. Thus University rankings provides students worldwide, the valuable information to help them to make decisions about higher education. There is a lot of scope to compare institutions, their benchmark performances and the scholarship and fellowship facilities. A Majority of the foreign universities rank high globally on internationally renowned ranking systems which explains the qualitative education imparted at these institutions. Many Indian students view foreign universities as offering globally recognized, high-quality education with advanced research facilities thus Indian bright minds inevitably choose foreign universities. The universities, especially in the US, UK, Canada and Australia often rank higher in these assessments, offering globally recognised degrees and access to advanced research opportunities. This appeals to Indian students seeking quality education and international credibility.

- **Better career prospects:**

The World we are living in today is highly competitive. There is a need for skilled professionals in the international job market. Studying at foreign universities can significantly enhance career opportunities by providing access to prestigious institutions, specialized programs, and global networks. It can also lead to higher salaries, better career prospects and higher quality of life due to increased demand for graduates with international education and experience. Thus for Indian students taking degrees in foreign universities is a lucrative investment.

- **Wide range of specialized courses at foreign universities:**

In India we have premier institutions like IIT's and IIM's which have rigorous curricula, expert faculty, state of the art facilities. Even though they are reputed institutions, they offer less flexibility in course selection and lack varied range of specialisations while compared to foreign Universities. Foreign universities, particularly in countries like the USA and UK, often offer a wider range of specialized programmes and flexible study options. STEM, business, Robotics and healthcare etc.

- **Global partnerships and integrated twinning programmes:**

The recent trend in reputed Indian institutions is the adoption of integrated twinning programmes, particularly the '3+1+1' model. This structure enables students to complete three years of undergraduate study in India, followed by one year at a partner university abroad to earn a degree, and an additional year for a master's degree at the same institution. The general concept of twinning programs in India began in the mid-1990s, allowing students to study abroad part-time. Such programmes not only shorten the traditional academic pathway but also offer cost-effective alternatives to full-time overseas education. These global partnerships extend beyond academics, offering students, diverse cultural exchanges, innovative teaching methodologies, and international work environments. Campus visits, and meticulous curriculum alignment to ensure seamless academic transitions.

- **Financial accessibility:**

There are good number of Government and privately funded scholarships available to the eligible Indian students to pursue higher education abroad. The scholarships covers tuition fees, living expenses and travel costs. The financial aid is provided not only by the Indian Government but NGO's like Tata education and development trust, Fulbright Nehru Research fellowship, Reliance Dhirubhai fellowship etc. Foreign universities too give scholarships to meritorious Indian students namely; British Council Great scholarships, LSE Commonwealth share scholarship scheme, Ms Agatha Harrison Memorial fellowship, Saltire scholarship and Fulbright scholarships for Indian students to actualise their potential and to make global education more inclusive for Indian students.

- **Availability of bank loan:**

It is a fact that pursuing higher education abroad is very expensive. Hence to provide access to our students who aspire to pursue higher education abroad, the leading public sector and private sector banks like SBI, ICICI, HDFC, and Axis finances the higher studies abroad for Indian students with low interest rates and flexible repayment options.

- **National and State Government scholarship schemes:**

Karnataka Government has launched Prabhudda Overseas scholarship scheme. The main objective of this scheme is to assist selected meritorious students from Karnataka domicile belonging to SC/ST communities to pursue their higher education from foreign universities. Full time tuition fees of students will be paid by Government of Karnataka. Rs. 8 lakh per year or 75% of actual cost will be given to student as maintenance allowance. The National Overseas scholarship (NOS) for students from Karnataka domicile belonging to minority and marginalised communities is offered by the Directorate of Minorities

provides financial assistance for pursuing postgraduate and Ph.D. degrees abroad. Thus getting degrees at reputed foreign institutions is no more a privilege of only the rich.

- **Governance issues:**

Several Governance challenges in India significantly influence students' decisions to pursue higher education abroad. Key factors include the intense competitions for limited seats at top Indian institutions, (for instance this year the total number of medical seats were 101,514 in India, while approximately 1,544,275 aspirants appeared for the NEET exam. The number of registered candidates was slightly higher, at 1,614,777). The impact of reservation policies and admission opportunities and bureaucratic hurdles within higher education system. The persistent brain-drain with talented teachers seeking improved academic and professional prospects overseas compounds the issue.

- **Cultural exposure and Holistic growth:**

Studying abroad provides invaluable exposure to diverse cultures, languages and worldviews. This global immersion fosters critical thinking, adaptability and intercultural communication skills to thrive in today's interconnected world.

- **Post-study work and residency options:**

Many countries offer post-study work visas and pathways to permanent residency for international students. These incentives make studying abroad more appealing to those who aspire to settle overseas.

- **Parental Aspirations:**

Opportunities of Pursuing Higher Education in Foreign Universities

- **Cross-Cultural Learning:** Studying abroad allows students to experience diverse cultures, traditions, and lifestyles. This exposure promotes open-mindedness, tolerance, and global understanding. It helps students develop intercultural communication skills and adaptability qualities which are highly valued in today's interconnected world.
- **Global Networking:** International universities bring together students, professors, and professionals from various countries. Building such global networks can open doors to career opportunities, research collaborations, and long-term professional relationships across borders.
- **Employability Enhancement:** Graduates from reputed foreign institutions are often preferred by employers for their international exposure, language skills, and ability to work in multicultural environments. The experience of studying abroad enhances both hard and soft skills, making students more competitive in the global job market.
- **Access to Advanced Research Facilities:** Foreign universities, especially in developed countries, often provide state-of-the-art research infrastructure, laboratories, libraries, and technology. Students gain hands-on experience with cutting-edge equipment and innovative methodologies, improving their academic and research competencies.
- **Global Career Pathways:** Studying overseas expands career prospects beyond national boundaries. Many countries allow international students to work after graduation, giving them the

opportunity to gain global work experience and pursue careers in multinational companies or international organizations.

- **Knowledge Exchange:** International education fosters the exchange of ideas, perspectives, and academic practices between students and faculty from different parts of the world. This sharing of knowledge contributes to intellectual growth and the creation of new, globally relevant insights.
- **Technological Exposure:** Foreign universities are often leaders in adopting and integrating advanced technology into education. Students are exposed to modern teaching tools, digital learning platforms, and innovative research techniques, helping them stay updated with global technological advancements.
- **International Collaborations:** Many universities engage in global partnerships for joint degrees, exchange programs, and collaborative research. Such collaborations provide students with broader academic exposure, dual qualifications, and the chance to study under globally recognized scholars.
- **Innovation and Entrepreneurship Prospects:** Exposure to diverse academic ecosystems encourages creativity and innovation.

Challenges:

The main aim of the Government and other contributing agencies in supporting higher education at foreign universities is to provide our bright minds with world class exposure so that they can return back fully skilled and contribute to the development of the nation. Alas! Large number of Indian students choose to stay abroad after graduation, resulting in a loss of skilled talent that could otherwise contribute to national development. It also impacts the national economy as overseas education and living costs are very dearer, leads to substantial outflow of foreign exchange. The growing pressure for foreign universities exerts pressure on Indian Institutions to upgrade infrastructure, revamp curricula, enhance research and innovation and foster international collaborations. There are other issues like overseas education loans pose challenges as graduates face global job market uncertainty, impacting loan repayment. Students must also navigate complex tax rules on remittance and earnings abroad. Some Indian parents have a pseudo thinking that if they send their children abroad for studies will elevate their social status definitely not. So there is a need to understand the reality of this complex world.

Conclusion:

India's higher education system is undergoing significant reforms and expansion. Yet, the growing migration of Indian students to foreign universities highlight the need for creating a more attractive and competitive higher education system that encourages students to pursue their academic and career goals within the country. To curb the trend of students prioritising foreign universities, higher education institutions in India need to focus on improving their quality, enhancing global recognition and make education more accessible and affordable. This involves strengthening existing institutions, creating a more globally competitive environment within India. Along with elevating the quality of education and training, enhancement of infrastructure and resources, Improvement in faculty quality, strengthening curriculum, promoting research and innovation, Improvement of University ranking, fostering

international collaborations, promoting Indian institutions globally, maximising career opportunities and ensuring cultural integration, safety and security are crucial.

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