



AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE REASONS FOR MIGRATION OF STUDENTS FROM KERALA TO ABROAD FOR HIGHER EDUCATION AND ITS SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPACTS

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Abstract

Migration, an inherent human phenomenon, has continuously shaped societies and cultures since the dawn of civilisation, driven by a complex interplay of economic, political, social, and environmental factors. In the era of globalisation, this process has become more accessible and prevalent, with interconnected economies facilitating increased labour mobility. Kerala, known for its historical patterns of migration for employment, is experiencing a significant shift as more of its youth migrate to various nations for higher education. This trend reflects broader aspirations for advanced skills and better opportunities, underscoring the evolving nature of migration in response to global educational and economic dynamics. Today, many students from Kerala choose to pursue education abroad primarily due to the lack of suitable job opportunities within the state. The high standards of education offered by foreign institutions also significantly attract these students. Additional factors driving this trend include inadequate salaries for jobs in Kerala, unfavourable social and economic conditions, the elevated social status enjoyed by those who study abroad, options to remain in foreign countries after completing their education, and the comparatively poor living conditions in Kerala. Other contributing reasons include gender bias and male dominance, moral policing within the state, and the appeal of less parental interference abroad. This migration for education reflects a complex blend of economic, social, and personal motivations. This study thus aims to identify and model some of the social and economic implications resulting from this migration trend in Kerala.

Keywords: Migration, Labour mobility, Economic dynamics, Moral policies, Gender bias.

Introduction

Improving education standards in Kerala alone won't stop students from going abroad for studies. The state's economy needs to improve to provide better pay and living standards. Understanding migration patterns can help create more inclusive, equitable, and sustainable societies. The current trend of students going abroad for higher

education is both a significant opportunity and a social issue. This new wave of migration is markedly different from Kerala's past migration patterns, as people now have the chance to gain permanent residency or citizenship in countries in the global north, unlike the temporary residencies in the Gulf countries. This shift could introduce new social and economic challenges for Kerala, highlighting the need to analyse the reasons behind this migration and its potential impact on the state's future.

The migration of Kerala's students is a complex issue that requires examination from various angles, including social issues, economic factors, the current education system, and lifestyle, among other aspects unique to Kerala's society. Migration is driven by diverse patterns, motives, and aspirations, making it a significant and recurring phenomenon rather than a mere coincidence.

Research Problem

To sustain economic growth, particularly given Kerala's ageing population, it is essential to address the rapidly increasing migratory cycle. Creating an environment where individuals migrate to pursue their goals and aspirations, rather than out of necessity or dissatisfaction, is crucial. This study aims to contribute to future research by identifying and modelling the social and economic implications of this migration trend in Kerala. By understanding these dynamics, the study seeks to provide insights that can help shape policies and strategies to manage migration effectively and support the region's long-term development.

Objectives of the Study

- To investigate the reasons behind students migrating from Kerala to abroad.
- To assess the economic and social conditions of their families.
- To understand the sources of financial support they obtain.
- To examine the academic and economic impacts of migration.

Literature Review

Reed, Lahey and Downey (1984), study explains that financial situation is paramount when deciding to study overseas due to the substantial costs involved in international education. Students must consider tuition fees, living expenses, travel costs, and potential currency exchange rates. These expenses vary widely depending on the country and institution chosen, making financial planning crucial. Scholarships, grants, and student loans are often sought after to alleviate some of these costs, but availability and eligibility can impact decisions significantly. Beyond direct costs, financial stability influences other aspects such as accommodation choices, lifestyle adjustments, and the ability to engage fully in academic and social opportunities abroad. Thus, understanding and managing one's financial situation effectively is pivotal in determining the feasibility and success of studying overseas.

Baron, Harris and Moogan (1999), reveal in their study that 37% of international undergraduate students rely on information from friends and parents when considering studying in countries like Australia and the United Kingdom. When friends study in different countries or institutions, they often encourage others to pursue education abroad. Family and friends are trusted sources because they provide information without seeking profit. Additionally, the financial situation of the student plays a significant role in deciding to study abroad and choosing a specific university or college of study.

Bourke 2000, Conard and Conard (2000), study say that financial situation is often the most critical factor influencing a student's decision to study overseas. Beyond this, students also gather information through various sources such as the internet, news articles, academic papers, reviews, and educational agents. These resources provide valuable insights into different universities, courses, and countries, helping students make informed decisions about their education abroad. The internet, in particular, offers a wealth of information ranging from official university websites to student forums and educational portals, enabling prospective students to compare options, understand admission requirements, and explore financial aid opportunities. Educational agents also play a role by offering personalized guidance and assistance throughout the application process, further supporting students in their pursuit of international education.

Murphy and Groms (2003), it is essential for students to have sufficient information available on the Internet to make informed decisions about their choice of host countries and global universities. This accessibility ensures they can consider factors like academic reputation, program offerings, cultural fit, and living conditions before committing to study abroad. The demand for international students is driven by several factors. Foremost among these is that a higher number of international students brings increased financial resources to the host country. These funds support the operations of private institutions, contributing to their sustainability and development. Additionally, international students enrich the academic environment with diverse perspectives and experiences, fostering a more globally connected learning community. Therefore, facilitating access to accurate and comprehensive information online not only benefits students in their decision-making but also enhances the educational landscape and economic vitality of host countries.

Bahiru, Teshome and Wondwosen (2006), the study investigated how student migration, much like other forms of migration, involves ongoing interaction among individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds, adapting to new socio-cultural settings. Focusing on African students in Pune, the research explored their perceptions of the local population and their experiences with inter and intra-racial relationships and cross-cultural interactions. The study revealed that African students are drawn to India due to several push and pull factors. Push factors include the limited availability of higher education institutions in Africa and political instability in some African countries. Conversely, pull factors include the comparatively affordable educational costs in India and streamlined admission procedures at universities and colleges. These factors collectively influence African students' decisions to pursue academic opportunities in Pune, highlighting the complex dynamics of international student mobility.

James and V John (2009) The study on interstate college student migration in Georgia found that most students tend to enrol in public institutions within their state, with a significant majority—88% of first-time freshmen in the University System of Georgia in 2002—graduating from Georgia schools. The research focused on how distance plays a crucial role in influencing student migration patterns within the state. It concluded that greater distances discourage intrastate student migration, but the impact varies depending on the type of higher education institution. This suggests that students may be more inclined to attend institutions closer to their homes due to practical considerations such as travel time, cost, and familiarity with local institutions. The study's empirical findings underscore the complex interplay between geographical distance and student mobility decisions in shaping enrollment patterns across different types of educational institutions within Georgia.

Association (2018), by focusing on social integration and community engagement, host countries can enhance the economic benefits derived from international student migration in several ways. When international students feel welcomed and integrated into the local community, they are more likely to have a positive experience and contribute positively to the local economy. Social integration promotes cultural exchange and understanding, which enriches the educational environment and fosters global perspectives among domestic students.

Bista (2020), countries can harness the knowledge and expertise brought in by international students by creating pathways for skilled graduates to contribute to the local workforce. This approach benefits economic growth and diversity in several ways. First, skilled international graduates can fill gaps in the local labour market, particularly in sectors where there is a shortage of specialized talent. This helps businesses and industries thrive by accessing a broader pool of qualified professionals. Second, these graduates often bring innovative ideas and fresh perspectives from their education and experiences abroad, which can stimulate creativity and entrepreneurship within the local economy.

Research Methodology

The current study is structured as descriptive research, a type of research design aimed at systematically gathering information to describe a phenomenon, situation, or population. This approach focuses on addressing questions related to what, when, where, and how regarding the research problem, rather than exploring why certain phenomena occur. Unlike experimental research, descriptive research does not involve the manipulation or control of variables. Instead, it identifies, observes, and measures variables to provide a comprehensive understanding of the subject

under investigation. This study utilises both primary and secondary data sources. Specifically, it relied on primary data gathered through a questionnaire prepared for the research. The population under study comprises individuals who have migrated from three districts of Kerala for educational purposes. 300 samples are selected through the snowball sampling method. A sample is a smaller and more manageable subset of a larger population that retains key characteristics of that population. It serves as a representative selection used in statistical testing when the entire population is too large to include every member or observation in the analysis

Data Analysis and Interpretation

1. Destinations of Students Migrated

Name of the Country	Number of Respondents	Percentage
United Kingdom	56	18.67
Canada	42	14.00
USA	17	5.67
New Zealand	9	3.00
Australia	39	13.00
Spain	7	2.33
Ireland	21	7.00
France	4	1.33
Usbekistan	19	6.33
China	6	2.00
Germany	44	14.67
Othres	36	12.00
Total	300	100

Source: Primary Data

The table indicates that among the surveyed sample, the UK emerged as the most favored destination for migration, chosen by 18.67% of respondents. Germany followed closely as the second preference. Both countries likely appeal due to their strong economies, cultural diversity, and opportunities in sectors like technology and education. Canada and Australia, also highlighted in the data, are known for their welcoming immigration policies, high standards of living, and expansive landscapes, making them attractive destinations for individuals seeking stability and quality of life abroad. These preferences reflect a combination of economic opportunities, quality of life considerations, and cultural factors influencing global migration patterns.

2. Current Status of Migrants

Current Status of Migrants	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Sudents	36	12
Student with part-time Job	216	72
Employed	48	16
Total	300	100

Source: Primary Data

Based on the analysis provided, it appears that a significant portion of migrated students are balancing their studies with part-time employment in their respective countries. Only 12% of the sample respondents maintained the status of being solely students, indicating that a large majority are engaging in some form of work alongside their studies. Additionally, 16% of the respondents have completed their studies and transitioned into permanent employment. This suggests a trend where many students are leveraging their educational experiences abroad to secure long-term career opportunities, contributing to the workforce of their chosen migration destinations. This dual focus on education and employment reflects the practical considerations and career aspirations of international students seeking to build their futures in foreign countries.

3. Current Visa Status

Current Visa Status	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Under Student Visa	241	80.33
Got Employment Visa	36	12.00
Got Residential Permit	20	6.67
Got Citizenship	3	1.00
Total	300	100.00

Source: Primary Data

The analysis indicates that a significant majority, 80.33%, of the sample respondents are residing in their respective countries under student visas. This highlights the primary purpose of their migration is education. Additionally, 12% of the respondents have transitioned to employment visas, suggesting a shift from education to work as they integrate into the local job market. Furthermore, 6.67% of the respondents have secured residential permits, indicating a move towards long-term settlement in their host countries. Notably, 3 respondents have gone a step further and obtained citizenship, demonstrating a complete integration and commitment to their new country. This range of visa statuses reflects various stages of migration and integration, from temporary student visas to permanent residency and citizenship.

4. Reasons for Migration

The analysis reveals several compelling reasons driving students to migrate from India. Predominantly, the aspiration for better income and career prospects is a significant motivating factor. Many students are also seeking superior educational opportunities available abroad, which they believe can enhance their skills and future job prospects. Additionally, a perceived lack of sufficient employment opportunities in India to meet their career expectations is another critical reason for migration. This combination of seeking enhanced education, better job prospects, and higher income potential illustrates the multifaceted motivations behind the decision of many Indian students to pursue opportunities abroad.

Reasons of Migration	Ranks
Economic conditions of family	5
Better income & career	1
Availability of scholarships	7
Shortage of employment opportunities	3
Political and Social climate of the country	6
Better education opportunities	2
Othres	8
Improved standard of living	4

Source: Primary Data

5. Socio-Economic Impact of Migration

Elements	Yes	No
Has the annual family income increased following migration?	143	157
Did migration cause any financial strain on the family?	217	83
Do the parents have any family members to provide support?	163	137
Did you take a loan to cover the cost of migration?	263	37
Are you experiencing any difficulty in repaying the loan?	113	187
Are you able to provide financial support for your family?	167	133
Do you still rely on your family to cover education expenses?	102	198
Do you intend to use your income to contribute to the economic development of your home country?	89	211
Are there any restrictions on sending money to your home country?	174	126
Are you able to cover your education expenses with your earnings?	192	108
Do you plan to settle in your home country after completing your education?	36	264

Source: Primary Data

The socio-economic analysis of migration among students highlights a range of challenges and impacts on both the migrants and their families. While many migrated students are able to send savings back home, not all can afford to do so, underscoring varying levels of financial capability among migrants. The expensive process of migration itself often places significant financial strain on families, contributing to overall financial difficulties. Moreover, parents of migrated students face social isolation and support challenges back home, as their children are often their primary source of support.

Financially, the burden of foreign education continues to weigh on some families, exacerbated by the inability of migrated family members to fully cover expenses from their salaries abroad. This situation is further complicated by restrictions imposed by host country governments on money transfers, hindering the flow of financial support to families. Despite these challenges, a majority of migrated students express a preference to remain abroad after completing their education, reflecting their career ambitions and opportunities in their host countries. This trend suggests a complex socio-economic landscape where migration impacts financial stability, social dynamics, and future settlement intentions among students and their families.

Conclusion

The migration of young students from Kerala to foreign countries for higher education is having notable social and economic impacts on the state. These effects are both beneficial and detrimental. The data analyzed shows that approximately an equal number of males and females are migrating from India, driven primarily by factors such as higher living standards, better educational opportunities, and higher wages in destination countries. Despite financial challenges, including the need to take loans or borrow money, many individuals still choose to migrate. Reasons for leaving vary from seeking higher income and living standards to accessing better healthcare and education facilities. As a result of migration, the financial circumstances of families in Kerala are undergoing significant transformations.

The trend shows that UK and Canada are highly favoured destinations, alongside Australia and Germany. Despite India's vast resources and youthful population, there is a lack of fundamental income standards. Many students perceive a lack of government support for youth and their career aspirations, citing excessive politicization, widespread corruption, and nepotism in promotions and high-level appointments. This environment often prompts the middle class, which comprises a significant portion of India's population, to consider migration. This outflow of talent poses risks such as brain drain, potentially impacting local industries and creating skills gaps. However, on a positive note, migration contributes to a globally educated workforce, promotes cultural exchange, and enhances Kerala's international standing. The large-scale migration is a big crisis in Kerala now and will be a bigger issue in the coming future striking a balance between retaining talent and benefiting from global exposure is crucial for Kerala's long-term socio-economic development.

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