

Preferences of Undergraduate Students towards Abroad Studies in Bharatpur, Chitwan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the preferences of undergraduate students in Bharatpur, Chitwan, regarding higher education abroad, aiming to identify key factors influencing their decisions. Data were collected from one hundred and twenty six students aspiring to pursue international education through a structured online questionnaire disseminated via social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram, and correlational research design is applied. The twenty-item survey examined factors including economic considerations, career prospects, personal development, and global exposure.

Descriptive statistics outlined respondents' demographic profiles, while correlation and regression analyses assessed the relationships between influencing factors and students' preferences. Reliability and validity tests confirmed the robustness of the instrument, with Cronbach's alpha indicating strong internal consistency.

The findings provide valuable insights into the motivations behind students' aspirations for international education, highlighting the importance of informed career guidance and policy support. This study contributes to understanding the evolving educational aspirations of Nepali students in the context of globalization.

Keywords: *Correlational study, higher education, higher education, Study abroad, undergraduate students*

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1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Nepal has experienced a substantial increase in the number of students seeking higher education abroad. UNESCO data indicates that the number of Nepali students studying overseas more than doubled from 44,255 in 2017 to 95,268 in 2022. Australia emerged as the most favored destination, attracting 42.77% of these students, followed by Japan (19.35%), India (14.24%), and the United States representing 13.28%, (Magar, D. G. (2024). This trend is particularly pronounced among undergraduate students in Bharatpur, Chitwan, who are increasingly opting for international education. Several factors drive this inclination. Foremost among them is the perception that foreign degrees offer superior academic quality and global recognition, enhancing employment prospects both domestically and internationally. Additionally, the allure of experiencing diverse cultures and environments plays a significant role; surveys reveal that over 78% of Nepali students consider cultural exposure a critical factor in their decision to study abroad,(Acharya, K. P. (2012). Economic considerations also influence this trend. Limited job opportunities and political instability in Nepal prompt students to seek

education in countries perceived to offer better career advancement and personal development opportunities. Despite the growing prevalence of this phenomenon, there is a scarcity of research focusing on the specific factors influencing the decision-making processes of students in Bharatpur. This study aims to bridge this gap by identifying and analyzing the determinants that shape these students' preferences for studying abroad. Understanding these factors is crucial for policymakers and educational institutions to address the underlying causes of student migration and to develop strategies that enhance the quality and appeal of domestic higher education. Furthermore, insights from this study can assist foreign universities, local colleges, and admission consultancies in refining their marketing strategies and support services to better cater to the aspirations of Bharatpur's student populace. By comprehensively examining the motivations and challenges faced by these students, this research endeavors to contribute to the broader discourse on educational mobility and its implications for Nepal's socio-economic landscape.

2. RELATED WORKS

Several studies have explored students'

perceptions and motivations regarding studying abroad. Dorji (2023) investigated the perspectives of students at Norbuling Rigter College on studying in foreign countries, aiming to understand their attitudes and expectations.

Adhikari (2024) found that Nepalese students prioritize comprehensive education, career opportunities, and the relevance of a foreign degree when choosing to study abroad. The study also noted that social circles and future career growth significantly influence students' choices, with gender playing a crucial role in determining their motivations.

Houser (2023) examined the perceived advantages and challenges of studying abroad among students from five programs across three institutions, all of whom attended a center in Costa Rica for part or all of their study abroad experience. The study found that students' academic year and prior travel experience influenced their perceptions of the benefits and barriers of studying abroad. Senior students (third- and fourth-year) viewed it as an opportunity to develop career-relevant skills, while junior students (first- and second-year) saw it as a means to broaden their horizons. Those with prior travel or high-impact learning experiences associated studying abroad with professional growth, while

those with limited travel experience saw it as a chance for cultural immersion. The findings highlight the importance of considering students' backgrounds when designing study abroad programs.

Similarly, Santos (2021) conducted a study on the study abroad experience, attitude formation, and academic performance in Ireland. Given the increasing focus on internationalizing higher education, the research developed a conceptual framework to identify the factors influencing students' decision-making processes when considering studying abroad.

Lawrence (2021) explored how students' intentions to study abroad are shaped by various factors, including decision-making confidence, personal characteristics, and the influence of the campus environment. The study linked different levels of motivation and commitment to these factors and explained why previous research has yielded mixed results regarding students' intentions and actual participation in study abroad programs. The study emphasized the need for improved measurement tools to better understand the gap between students' interest in studying abroad and actual enrollment.

Agrawal (2021) noted that an increasing number of students recognize studying

abroad as a means to enhance their career prospects, especially in a competitive job market that demands global knowledge and skills. The study found that students typically preferred destinations such as the United States, Australia, and European countries. In an earlier study, Agrawal (2019) analyzed the factors influencing students' choice of study destinations, focusing on Indian students in Ranchi and Jamshedpur. The research highlighted that studying abroad has become a global industry, significantly contributing to the economies of countries like the U.S., Canada, and Australia. The findings emphasized the role of family influence in students' decision-making processes, with parents often being the most trusted source of information.

Haldorai (2017) examined the key pre-decision factors motivating Indian students to seek education abroad. The study identified financial considerations, academic quality, and career prospects as critical determinants in students' decision-making processes.

While most research on study abroad focuses on academic and career motivations, some studies have explored broader factors affecting students' academic performance. Utete (2023) identified institutional and socio-economic factors such as tutorial

attendance, previous examinations, self-assigned homework, and study groups as key determinants of academic success. The study also found that parental education level, income, and involvement in students' academics significantly impact performance. Interestingly, despite financial hardships, some students managed to excel academically and progress to higher academic levels.

Mary (2020) investigated undergraduate dental students' interest in postgraduate education and found that, although most students wished to pursue higher studies, financial constraints and limited postgraduate seats created significant barriers. The study aligned with previous findings on specialization choices, emphasizing the challenges students face in furthering their education.

These studies highlight the various academic, social, financial, and institutional factors that shape students' decisions and experiences regarding studying abroad. As international education continues to grow in importance, universities and policymakers must address these factors to better support students in their educational journeys.

3. METHODS

3.1 Study design and population

This study adopts a correlational research design to systematically analyze the factors influencing undergraduate students' preferences for studying abroad. The targeted population consists of undergraduate students in Bharatpur, Chitwan, who aspire to pursue higher education overseas. Given the large student population in the region, a sample size of 126 respondents has been selected to ensure a representative and meaningful analysis. The study seeks to identify key determinants of students' choices and their perceptions of international education opportunities.

3.2 Method of data collection and analysis

The study primarily relies on primary data collection through a structured questionnaire. To ensure efficient data collection within a limited timeframe, a Google Form survey was developed and disseminated through social media platforms such as Facebook and Instagram. The questionnaire consists of 20 items designed to capture information on key variables influencing students' decisions, including economic factors, career prospects, and personal development aspirations. In terms of data analysis, both descriptive and inferential statistical techniques are employed. Descriptive statistics provide an overview of respondents' demographic characteristics, while inferential methods such as correlation and regression analysis examine relationships between decision-

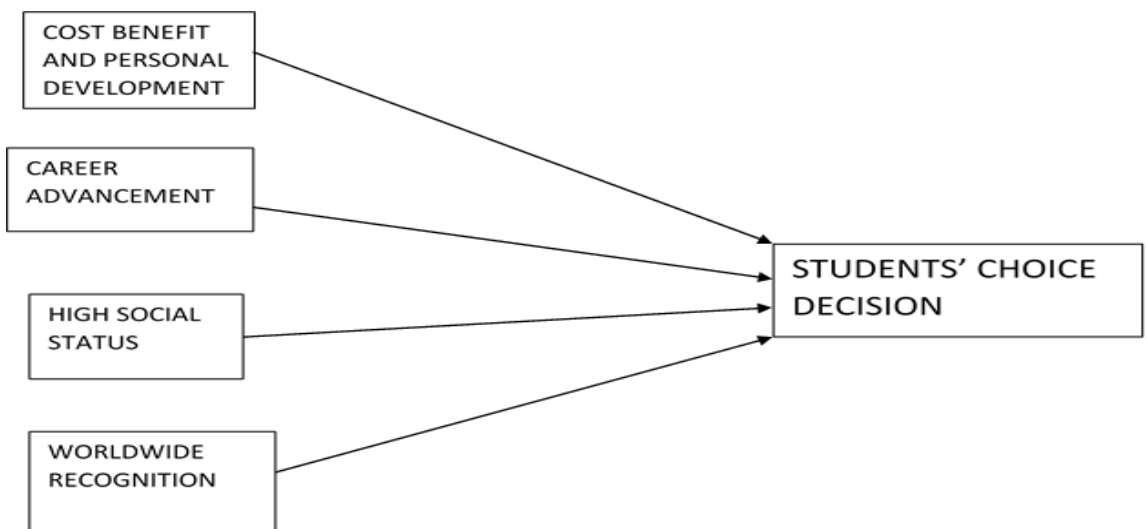


Figure 1: Conceptual framework of the study

making factors and students' study-abroad preferences. The analytical approach enables a comprehensive understanding of how different variables interact and influence students' choices

Reliability and variability test Reliability refers to the consistency of the measure whereas Validity refers to accuracy of measure. In the research, maintaining validity and reliability was crucial for accuracy and trustworthiness. Validity ensured the research covered all relevant aspects, measured theoretical concepts effectively, and aligned with established standards. Reliability ensured consistent measurement across the study, crucial for trustworthy outcomes. Cronbach's alpha is like a reliability score. If it's high (close to 1), it means people generally agree on the questions we asked. It helps us make sure our survey is reliable and the answers are consistent. Cronbach's alpha can assess the internal consistency reliability of the instruments. Cronbach's alpha should be 0.7 or higher, for exploratory purposes, but 0.6 or higher is also acceptable (Hair, J. F., Black, W. C., Babin, B. J., & Anderson, R. E., 2019).

Table 1: Reliability analysis

Scale	Cronbach's α
Career Advancement	0.974
Worldwide Recognition	0.987

High Social Status	0.994
Career Benefit	0.947
Student's Choice Decision	0.993
Total	0.987

The Cronbach's α for the scale that includes the variables of Career Advancement, Worldwide Recognition, High Social Status, Career Benefit and students' Choice Decision, which stands at 0.987, which is excellent and exceeds the recommended threshold of 0.7 for reliability. A Cronbach's α of 0.987 suggests a high degree of internal consistency among the items within this scale

3.3 Theoretical background

This study is grounded in theories of student mobility and decision-making frameworks that explain educational migration. The push-pull model serves as a key theoretical foundation, highlighting how push factors (e.g., limited job opportunities, political instability, and quality concerns in domestic education) and pull factors (e.g., better career prospects, global recognition, and financial incentives) shape students' preferences for studying abroad. Additionally, human capital theory is relevant in understanding how students perceive international education as an investment that enhances their future employability and earning potential. By integrating these theoretical perspectives,

the study aims to provide a well-rounded explanation of why undergraduate students in Bharatpur, Chitwan, opt for overseas education.

Customer satisfaction theories and service quality models provide the theoretical foundation for this study. The study primarily draws on the SERVQUAL model, which evaluates service quality based on five key dimensions: tangibility, reliability, responsiveness, assurance, and empathy. Additionally, the Expectation-Disconfirmation Theory (EDT) is considered to explain how customer satisfaction arises from the comparison between expected and actual service performance. Pricing theories and consumer behavior models further support the analysis, helping to assess the impact of cost perception on customer satisfaction. These theoretical frameworks guide the research methodology, ensuring a structured approach to evaluating the key determinants of customer satisfaction with NTC's mobile services in Chitwan. Based on this theoretical background we proposed conceptual framework (see Figure 1):

4. RESULTS

In this research, the composition of respondent is selected to make inclusive

sample to represent population accurately as far as possible. Among the group of 126 respondents, 88 individuals are categorized as female, constituting 69.8% of the total. On the male side, there are 38 individuals, accounting for the remaining 30.2%. The cumulative percentage showcases that the entire group is accounted for, with females and males together totaling 100. Within the sample population, 16 respondents, 15 individuals fall within the "18-20" age group, representing 11.9% of the total. The "20-24" age group is the most prevalent, comprising 108 respondents, which accounts for 85.7%. 25 and above age group consists of only 3 respondents, making up 2.4% of the total. The cumulative percentage demonstrates that the majority of respondents, nearly 97.6% are aged below 25, highlighting a relatively demographic profile within the surveyed population. Also, for the family annual income distribution for 126 respondents. The largest group, 26.2% earns between 250,001 to 5,00,000 annually. The next largest, 24.6% earns 500,001 to 750,000. Those earning 250,000 or less have 16.7% with respondent of 21.while the smallest group of people earning more than 10,00,000 stands of 11.1% with counting number of 14 respondents.

Table 3: Challenges faced by the respondents

Levels	Respondents	%
Language barrier	20	15.9%
Cultural differences	20	15.9%
Homesickness	46	36.5%
Safety concerns	11	8.7%
Academic challenges	29	23.0%

The data on challenges faced by undergraduate students considering studying abroad in Bharatpur, Chitwan, reveals that homesickness is the most significant concern, affecting 36.5% of students. Academic challenges are the second most common worry, with 23% of students feeling apprehensive about adapting to different academic systems. Both language barriers and cultural differences equally concern 15.9% of students, highlighting issues with communication and cultural adaptation. Lastly, 8.7% of students are worried

about their safety abroad. These insights suggest that emotional support, academic preparation, language and cultural training, and safety information are essential to help students overcome these challenges.

Correlation analysis examines how two or more variables are related. It quantifies the strength and direction of this relationship, summarizing it into a single number called the correlation coefficient. This coefficient ranges from -1 to +1 and is often referred to as Pearson's correlation or Pearson's correlation coefficient. When the value is between 0 and 1 there is positive correlation between the variables, when the value is 0 there is no correlation and when the value is between 0 and -1 there is negative correlation. It provides insights into strong and in what direction the variables are correlated.

Where, INDEP CB is Independent cost benefit and personal development, INDEP Ca is Independent career advancement, INDEP Wr is Independent worldwide

Table 4: Correlation analysis

	INDEP CB	INDEP Ca	INDEP Wr	INDEP Hss	DEP Scd
INDEP CB					
INDEP Ca	0.597***				
INDEP Wr	0.559***	0.863***			
INDEP Hss	0.552***	0.826***	0.923***		
DEP Scd	0.58***	0.751***	0.88***	0.96***	

recognition, INDEP Hss is Independent High social status, and DEP Scd is Dependent Student's choice decision. The matrix reveals strong and statistically significant positive correlations among all the pairs of variables. Specifically INDEP Ca, INDEP Wr, INDEP Hss have a robust positive correlations with DEP Scd, with correlation exceeding 0.7 and having a p-value less than 0.001. Hence, this correlation matrix provides interconnections among these variables, and factors affecting on making choices on studying abroad. A statistical method that examines the relationship between a dependent variable and one or more independent variables. It helps uncover associations and predict values, but it doesn't easily determine causation. It is used in business, finance, and economics to understand how variables are related and to build predictive models. After gathering data, regression analysis (often performed using software) builds a model to describe the relationships between variables. In research, regression analysis will help you understand how factors like cost benefits, personal development, career advancement, high social status, and worldwide recognition influence students' decisions to study abroad.

$$Y = \alpha + \beta_1 X_1 + \beta_2 X_2 + \beta_3 X_3 + \beta_4 X_4 + E$$

Where, α is a constant and $\beta_1, \beta_2, \beta_3, \beta_4$ = regression coefficients for the respective independent variables. Also, X_1 = Cost Benefit and Personal Development, X_2 = Career Advancement, X_3 = High Social Status, X_4 = Worldwide Recognition, Y = Dependent variables and E is known as error term. The difference between actual and predicted value of regression value.

Table 5: Model fit test and model summary

R	R ²	F	df	p
0.967	0.935	438	(4,12)	<0.001

The table provides information on the overall model fit measures for a specific model. The model demonstrates a high level of fit, with an R-square (R^2) value of 0.935 indicating that approximately 93.5% of the variance in the dependent variable is explained by the independent variables in the model. The overall model test, assessed using an F-test, yields a highly significant result with a p-value less than 0.001. This indicates that the model as a whole is a good fit for the data and that the relationship between the independent and dependent variables is statistically significant. In summary, the model appears to provide a strong fit to the data, explaining a substantial portion of the variance in the independent variable, and the overall model test confirms its statistical significance. Further the regression analysis shows that Cost Benefit, Career Advancement and

Table 6: Test of regression coefficients

Predictor	Estimate	SE	t-statistics	p-value
Intercept	0.078	0.0608	1.284	0.202
CB	0.1093	0.0293	3.733	<.001
Wr	0.0581	0.0679	0.856	0.393
Hss	0.9702	0.0584	16.6	<.001
Ca	-0.2054	0.0489	-4.198	<.001

High Social Status are significant positive predictors of the dependent variable (Scd). While Worldwide Recognition is not a significant predictor in this model.

The intercept is the predicted value of the dependent variable (Scd) when all predictors are zero. In this case, the intercept is not statistically significant ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$), indicating it does not differ significantly from zero. The coefficient for CB is 0.1093, which is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$). This means that for each unit increase in Cost Benefit, the dependent variable (Scd) increases by approximately 0.1093 units, holding other variables constant. The coefficient for Wr is 0.0581, which is not statistically significant ($p\text{-value} > 0.05$). This indicates that Worldwide Recognition does not have a significant impact on the dependent variable (Scd) in this model. The coefficient for Hss is 0.9702, which is highly significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$). This means that for each unit increase in High Social Status, the dependent variable (Scd)

increases by approximately 0.9702 units, holding other variables constant. This is a very strong and significant predictor. The coefficient for Ca is -0.2054, which is statistically significant ($p\text{-value} < 0.001$). This means that for each unit increase in Career Advancement, the dependent variable (Scd) decreases by approximately 0.2054 units, holding other variables constant. This suggests a negative relationship between Career Advancement and the dependent variable.

5. DISCUSSION

The regression model explains that 93.5% of the variance in students' choice decisions with significant predictors, which includes high social status and personal development. The research demonstrates high reliability, with Cronbach's α for the overall scale being 0.987, indicating excellent internal consistency among the variables. There is a significant relationship between Independent Variables (Career

Advancement, High Social Status, Cost Benefits and Personal Development) and Dependent Variable (Student's Decision to Study Abroad). On the other hand, there is no significant relationship between worldwide recognition and student's choice decisions to study abroad. The most significant challenge faced by the Bharatpur Chitwan, is the homesickness affecting 36.5%. Likewise, Academic Challenges and Safety Concerns are also notable concerns

5.1 Limitation

This study is limited to exploring the preferences of undergraduate students towards studying abroad in Bharatpur, Chitwan, and does not encompass all universities and colleges in the region. The findings are constrained by a limited timeframe and a small sample size, which may affect the generalizability of the results. Despite these limitations, the research provides valuable insights into the factors influencing students' decisions to pursue higher education overseas.

6. CONCLUSION

The first hypothesis (H01), which stated that "there is no significant relationship between Student's choice decision and Worldwide Recognition," was accepted with a p-value of 0.393. This suggests

that Worldwide Recognition doesn't play a significant role in influencing in Student's Choice Decision. Similarly, the second hypothesis (H02) suggested that "There is no significant relationship between Student's choice decision and Career Advancement" was rejected with a p-value of .001. Indicating that Career Advancement is a significant contributor to Student's choice decision. The hypothesis (H03) which posited that "There is no significant relationship between Student's choice decision and High social Status," was also rejected with a p-value <0.01, showing the effectiveness of high social status on Student's Choice decision. The fourth hypothesis (H04), which proposed "There is no significant relationship between Student's choice decision and Cost Benefits/ Personal Development," was also rejected. These findings provide valuable insights for student's decision by prioritizing factors such as Cost Benefit/ Personal

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