

GLOBAL DREAMS: EXPLORING INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION INTENTIONS OF STUDENTS IN KERALA

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Abstract

The phenomenon of international migration, particularly for education and career opportunities, has become a significant aspect of contemporary life in many regions of the world. Among these, Kerala, India, has witnessed a growing trend of student migration, driven by various factors such as educational aspirations, career prospects, and the desire for improved living standards. Despite the significant body of literature on migration, there is a gap in understanding the specific factors influencing students' intentions to migrate abroad, especially from regions like Kerala, which has a unique socio-economic and cultural landscape. This study aims to explore the motivations, perceptions, and decision-making processes that guide student migration intentions from Kerala. The study employs a mixed-methods research design to gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue. A combination of qualitative interviews and quantitative surveys was used to collect data from students currently enrolled in higher education institutions in Kerala. The study focuses on undergraduate and postgraduate students, as these groups are most likely to consider migration for educational and career purposes. The qualitative interviews provide an in-depth look at the personal, social, and emotional factors influencing migration intentions, while the quantitative survey captures the broader trends and patterns across a larger sample of students. The findings of the study reveal several key factors that influence the intention to migrate abroad. Among these, the primary motivators include the perceived quality of education and better career prospects abroad. Students believe that international education provides them with an edge in the global job market, especially in highly competitive fields such as technology, healthcare, and business. Additionally, economic factors such as higher earning potential, better job security, and the ability to support families back home are significant drivers of migration intentions. Family influence also plays a crucial role in students' decisions. Many students reported that family members, particularly those with prior international exposure or overseas employment, encourage migration for educational purposes. Societal expectations of success and social mobility further reinforce these aspirations. Additionally, the desire for enhanced quality of life, including access to better healthcare, infrastructure, and a safer environment, were identified as important non-educational factors driving migration decisions. However, the study also identifies several barriers to migration, such as financial constraints, the complexity of visa procedures, and concerns about cultural adaptation. Despite these challenges, many students expressed strong intentions to migrate, indicating that the benefits of migration outweigh these perceived obstacles. The role of governmental and institutional policies, both in Kerala and in the destination countries, was also explored. The study found that policies promoting overseas education, scholarships, and ease of visa processing have a positive impact on students' decisions to migrate. Furthermore, the global migration trends, particularly in response to changing political and economic landscapes, also shape students' perceptions of migration feasibility. In conclusion, the study sheds light on the multidimensional nature of student migration intentions from Kerala. While the desire for better educational opportunities and career prospects remains the central driver, social, familial, and economic factors also play critical roles. These insights can inform policymakers, educational institutions, and migration consultants who aim to better understand and cater to the needs of students considering international migration. The study also calls for further research into the long-term effects of migration on the socio-economic development of Kerala and the role of international migration in shaping the region's future.

Keywords: Student migration, Kerala, international migration, socio-economic factors, migration intention, policy impact.

Introduction

The migration of people from Kerala to other countries is a familiar aspect. People from the state used to migrate to cities like Mumbai, Delhi, Chennai in India as well as to Singapore Malaysia since the 1940s and in those days semi-skilled or office workers used to migrate. The oil boom in Gulf countries during the '70s and 80s was the main reason for the migration of Keralites to Middle East countries. But the Gulf Countries had brought stringent measures but despite that immigrants from Kerala became an asocial feature in that region. This migration had helped the economy to attain better standard of living in the state. The Gulf countries and their opportunities became an integral part of Kerala's youth life while developing future goals and aspirations. Late own professionally qualified persons such as nurses, and teachers used to migrate. After 1990s Kerala saw highly qualified professionals such as doctors, engineers, and academicians moving to other parts of the world. Recently the migration phenomenon is characterized by the migration of students who would like to pursuit their academic opportunities beyond the borders. The impetus behind this are socio, economic as well as institutional factors. Nowadays the type of migration that is experienced by the Kerala economy is different. People have begun to migrate to attain permanent residency or citizenship of the country to which they have migrated.

Review of literature

Some of the literature which was used as a base for this study are:

- In their study, Justine George and Alphonsa Kurien(2024) opine that youth unemployment is a significant factor determining the decision of the younger generation to migrate. The study also points out that female unemployment is twice as high as male unemployment and this is the main reason for high migration of female youth.
- Mary Lucia Joseph(2023) found that the students find destinations in the global north as attractive as a place for permanent settlement and this trend is likely to continue. The study also states that there could be a wave of return migration if potential opportunities are discovered in Kerala or due to economic downturn negatively affecting the destination countries.
- Reghuram Parvathi(2013) thinks that student migration is a key ingredient of knowledge migration. Student migrants are involved in family and labor migration, so how can be the students distinguished from this? The paper reviews theories of student mobility and also examines how students become agents in configuring the constitution, power, and sustainability of academic knowledge.

- Skariah and Sivarenjini's (2024) study on the motivation, experiences, and trends in student mobility, the primary driving force for migration is the desire for better employment opportunities and higher-quality education. According to this study, people prefer to travel to English-speaking nations like the UK, New Zealand, and Germany
- Jovana Pramod(2023) states that students studying abroad build their traits or better cultural adjustment which are more suitable for society's needs. It helps both the host country and the home country flow faster of labor and capital.
- Sulaiman and Bhagat (2022) had made a study on youth's awareness of and desire to migrate from Kerala. They took a sample of 491 students and found that 2 out of 3 want to migrate abroad for work related reasons. Young migrants mind are conditioned by their household migration experience, with the children of migrant fathers to less likely to migrate compared to non migrant fathers.

Theoretical Framework

As a more specific perspective, the Harris-Todaro model of migration focuses on the growing urbanization in developing countries and argues that migration from rural to urban areas is a result of the rational economic behaviour of individuals acting on the wage differential between the areas. This model highlights unemployment as a factor that regulates the flow of migrants (Todaro, 1969, Harris & Todaro, 1970). While Harris and Todaro were dealing with rural-to-urban migration within a country, their framework has been applied to international migration as well. Expectations of higher wages in the United States, for instance, are a major force attracting migrants from Central and South America. The Harris-Todaro model of migration which concentrates on wage differentials, and the Historical Structural models which emphasize capitalism-driven labour force movements are also important variants of the push and pull model. This theory is used as a foundational theoretical framework to understand the underlying reasons and patterns of the current wave of student migration from Kerala, to then be able to expand and the social and economic impacts this wave of migration can have on Kerala.

Significance of the study

This study aims to bridge this gap by providing a detailed analysis of the forces shaping international student migration from Kerala. It contributes to the broader understanding of international student migration, which has far-reaching economic, cultural, and educational implications. The study's findings have practical implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and students themselves, as they shed light on the factors influencing migration

decisions and the challenges migrating students face. The outcomes of this study are expected to benefit a wide range of stakeholders, including educational institutions, government agencies, and the students themselves, as they navigate the complex landscape of international education and migration. Thus, the present study mainly focuses on the factors that influence students' intention to migrate based on Changanacherry municipality.

Objectives

1. To make an overview of international student migration from Kerala
2. To assess students' intention to migrate abroad
3. To determine the factors influencing students to migrate abroad
4. To evaluate the extent to which students' intention to migrate abroad varies across their socio-economic background

Hypothesis

- H1: There exists a significant difference among the students concerning their level of intention to migrate abroad
- H2: There exists a significant difference in the mean ranks for factors influencing students to migrate abroad
- H3: There exists a significant difference in students' intention to migrate across their socio-economic background

Methodology

The target population for this study comprises students from Changanacherry in the Kottayam district. A snowball sampling method is used for the study. The study's sample size is 45. Primary data is collected using a structured questionnaire, telephonic interviews, and Google Forms. The questionnaire encompasses structured questions to gather detailed information on the factors that influenced their intention to migrate. The study made use of statistical techniques such as chi-square, Friedman test, independent t-test, and one-way ANOVA for analysis using SPSS.

The study also made use of secondary data sources such as Economic Review 2023 Kerala Migration Survey 2023, research articles, etc for the study.

Students' Intention to migrate

The study tries to analyse the intention of students to migrate. The demographic profile shows that 66.6% of the total respondents are in the age group 20-25 years, 26.67% of the respondents are in the age group 25-30 years and 6.67% of the respondents are in the age group below 20 years. Out of the total respondents 66.67% of them are males and 33.3% of

them are females.66.67% of the respondents are Christians, 31.1% of the respondents are Hindus and 2.2% of the respondents are Muslims.66% of them are degree-qualified. 33.3% of them have acquired professional degrees such as Btech, BBA etc. and 6.6% of them were plus two qualified.

The first objective of the study is to assess students' intention to migrate abroad. Based on this the hypothesis that formulated was there exists a significant difference among the students concerning their level of intention to migrate abroad. The explanation has been given in Table 1.2.

Table No 1.1
Level of Students' Intention in Migration - Chi Square Test for Goodness of Fit

		High Intention	Moderate Intention	Low Intention	Chi Square	P	Decision
Students' Intention to Migrate	F	30	10	5	25.214	<0.001**	H₁ Supported
	%	66.67	22.22	11.11			

**** Significant at 1% level**

H1: There exists a significant difference among the students concerning their level of intention to migrate abroad

The Chi-Square Test for Goodness of Fit was used to test the hypothesis and the results are illustrated in Table 1.1.As per the Table No 1.1. it can be seen that most students (66.7%) have a high intention to migrate, out of the sample 22.22% and 11.11% of the respondents have a moderate and low intention to migrate. The statistical difference between these three levels is significant as the p-value is relevant at the 1% level. Thus the hypothesis states the significant difference among the students concerning their level of intention to migrate.

The second objective of the study is study is to determine the factors influencing students to migrate abroad. The hypothesis is that there exists a significant difference in the mean ranks for factors influencing students to migrate abroad. The explanation has been given using Table 1.2.

Table No 1.2
Factors influencing Student Migration - Friedman Test

Factors	Mean Rank	Chi Square	P	Decision
Education	5.690	68.816	<0.001**	H₁ Supported
Higher wages and a better standard of living	6.453			
Low employment opportunities in home country	4.952			
Suggested by family friends	4.466			

**** Significant at 1% level**

H2: There exists a significant difference in the mean ranks for factors influencing students to migrate aboard Friedman test was used to test the hypothesis and the results are illustrated in Table No. 1.2.

Following Table, No 1.2, it can be observed that students are highly influenced by their wish to earn higher wages and achieve a better standard of living in a foreign country. it secured the highest mean rank (6.453). Following this is better education as the secondary factor as it has a mean rank of 5.690, and students' suggestions by family members as the least influential factor as it has the lowest mean rank of 4.466. The significant difference between all these factors is statistically relevant as the p-value is significant at a 1% level, consequently, the hypothesis is supported.

The third objective of the study us to evaluate the extent to which students' intention to migrate abroad varies across their socio-economic background. On the basis of this, the following hypothesis was formulated.

H3: There exists a significant difference in students' intention to migrate across their socio-economic background. This hypothesis has been tested using 3 sub hypotheses based on age, gender, and family income. The explanation is given using tables 1.3,1.4 and 1.5.

Table No.1.3

Students' Intention in Migration across their Gender - Independent Sample t test

Factor	Gender Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	T	P	Decision
Students' Intention to Migrate	Male	2.935	0.817	-0.097	0.923	H_{3a} Not Supported
	Female	2.946	0.776			

H3a: Students' intention to migrate abroad varies significantly across their Gender

An Independent Sample t-test was used to test the hypothesis and the results are illustrated in Table No 1.3. By observing Table No, it can be drawn that males and females are not different concerning their intention to migrate to a foreign country as the P value is not significant at 1% or 5%. So, the hypothesis is not supported and it is concluded that the gender of the students is not an influencing factor in determining factor in their intention to migrate.

Table No.1.4

Students' Intention in Migration across their Age - One Way ANOVA

Factor	Age Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P	Decision
Students' Intention to Migrate	Below 20	3.310	0.482	6.904	<0.001**	H_{3b} Supported
	20-25	3.616	0.553			
	26-30	3.841	0.752			

**** Significant at 1% level**

H3b: Students' intention to migrate abroad varies significantly across their Age

One Way ANOVA was used to test the hypothesis and the results are illustrated in Table No 1.4. As per Table No. 1.4, it is found that the intention of students to migrate is significantly different between the different age groups of students as the p-value is significant at the 5% level. By analyzing the mean value, it is understood that students between 26-30 years have more intention to migrate. Thus, the hypothesis is supported and age is considered as an influencing factor in determining their intention to migrate.

Table No 1.5
Students' Intention in Migration across their Monthly Family Income- One Way ANOVA

Factor	Age Groups	Mean	Std. Deviation	F	P	Decision
Students' Intention to Migrate	Below 50,000	3.158	0.543	3.793	0.026*	H _{3c} Supported
	50,001-1,00,000	3.512	0.484			
	Above 1,00,000	3.492	0.751			

* **Significant at 5% level**

H_{3c}: Students' intention to migrate abroad varies significantly across their monthly family income

One Way ANOVA was used to test the hypothesis and the results are illustrated in Table No 1.5, As per Table No1.5, it is found that the intention of students to migrate is significantly different between the different monthly family incomes of students as the p-value is significant at the 5% level. By analyzing the mean value, it is understood that students between income group 50,000-1,00,000 have more intention to migrate. Thus, the hypothesis is supported and monthly family income of students is considered as an influencing factor in determining their intention to migrate.

The Major findings of the study are:

- 66.6% of the total respondents are in the age group 20-25 years, 26.67% of the respondents are in the age group 25-30 years and 6.675 of the respondents are in the age group below 20 years
- Out of the total respondents 66.67% of them are males and 33.3% of them are females.
- 66.67% of the respondents are Christians, 31.1% of the respondents are Hindus and 2.2% of the respondents are Muslims
- 66% of them are degree-qualified. 33.3% of them have acquired professional degrees such as Btech, BBA etc. and 6.6% of them were plus two qualified.
- There exists a significant difference among the students concerning their level of intention to migrate abroad. Most students (66.7%) have a high intention to migrate, out

of the sample 22.22% and 11.11% of the respondents have a moderate and low intention to migrate.

- There exists a significant difference in the mean ranks for factors influencing students to migrate aboard
- It can be observed that students are highly influenced by their wish to earn higher wages and achieve a better standard of living in a foreign country.
- The gender of the students is not an influencing factor in determining factor in their intention to migrate.
- It is found that the intention of students to migrate is significantly different between the different age groups of students
- Age is considered as an influencing factor in determining their intention to migrate.
- It is understood that students between income group 50,000-1,00,000 have more intention to migrate. Thus, the hypothesis is supported and monthly family income of students is considered as an influencing factor in determining their intention to migrate.

Suggestions

- An awareness campaign should be provided to students and parents regarding international education and its opportunities.
- The migration pattern seems to be increasing it might be due to the lower education standards in the Indian scenario, in comparison. Thus, an improvement in the quality of education standards is needed to keep migration from improving two-fold in the future.
- The courses that people choose abroad are very expensive in prestigious institutions in India which makes people choose abroad institutions that are more worthy for job or work purposes. Even though Indian degrees are oriented, fees are high. Reduction of fees might improve better crowd for studies in domestic countries.
- While moving out abroad, there is a high tendency to stay back and earn in a foreign country due to high salary and exchange rates making abroad work superior. If high professional jobs are paid higher migration shall be moderated.
- To moderate migration purposes, acceptance of degrees must be improved. International degrees need to be accepted with equivalent importance to Indian degrees and vice-versa.
- Students felt a lack of adequate employment opportunities available in Kerala. So Productive employment opportunities must be generated for all job seekers, especially those with higher secondary education, which might be a good policy option to curtail massive student migration.

Conclusion

This study on international student migration from Kerala focuses on the trend of migration, and the factors of motivation for students to migrate. It highlights the primary drivers of migration as the quest for superior education, better career opportunities, and economic stability, reflecting a critique of local education systems and the global ambition of students. An increase in preference for foreign countries emerges, followed by linguistic familiarity and perceived advantages in education and employment. The tendency of students to seek employment in host countries post-graduation suggests a shift in migration objectives, that is leading to a 'brain drain' in Kerala. However, changes in the higher education process are happening now due to the implementation of the Four Year Under Graduate Programme (FYUGP) in the state universities and affiliated colleges, which, in turn, are expected to prevent further student migration from Kerala. So as to conclude the study shows that the high intention for students to migrate for better wages, living standards, employment opportunities, and education. The Government urgently needs to create a master plan context of youth employment and massive student migration.

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