

EDUCATION OR OPPORTUNITY? UNDERSTANDING THE REAL DRIVERS OF STUDENT MIGRATION FROM NEPAL

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ABSTRACT

International student migration has emerged as a significant component of global mobility, particularly among young people from developing countries seeking educational opportunities, employment prospects, and long-term socio-economic mobility. Nepal has experienced a rapid increase in educational migration over the past decade, with growing numbers of students pursuing higher education abroad. This study aims to examine the key drivers of student migration from Nepal and to assess whether overseas education functions primarily as an academic pursuit or as a pathway to employment and broader migration opportunities. Using a mixed-methods research design that combines quantitative survey data from 120 migrant-intending students with qualitative evidence from focus group discussions and key informant interviews with education consultants, the study explores motivations for migration, destination preferences, skill preparation strategies, financing mechanisms, and the broader socio-economic implications of educational migration. The findings indicate that student migration is primarily driven by aspirations for employment opportunities, access to global education systems, and structured work–study pathways that provide legal entry into foreign labour markets. Japan emerges as the most preferred destination, largely due to its language-based migration pathways, part-time employment opportunities, and strong migrant networks. Migration decisions are strongly influenced by social networks and family support, while financial resources are primarily mobilized through parental investment complemented by scholarships and self-earning strategies. The study also highlights significant consequences of student migration, including declining enrollment in domestic institutions, capital outflows, and the potential loss of skilled human resources. The paper argues that educational migration should be understood not simply as academic mobility but as a hybrid migration strategy that combines human capital investment with labour migration and long-term settlement planning.

Keywords: Student migration, key drivers, opportunity or education, migration decision, Nepal

1.0 INTRODUCTION

International migration has undergone significant transformation in recent decades as globalization, demographic change, and economic restructuring have reshaped patterns of human mobility worldwide. Traditional forms of migration, largely dominated by permanent

settlement and labour mobility, have increasingly been complemented by more diverse forms of temporary and circular migration. Among these emerging forms, international student migration has become one of the most dynamic and rapidly expanding categories of cross-border mobility (King & Raghuram, 2013; OECD, 2022). Unlike conventional labour migration, student mobility operates at the intersection of education systems, migration policies, and global labour markets, creating complex mobility regimes that increasingly blur the boundaries between study, work, and long-term migration.

Over the past three decades, international student mobility has expanded dramatically. According to UNESCO statistics, the number of students studying outside their home countries increased from approximately 2 million in the early 2000s to more than 6 million by the early 2020s (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2022). Much of this growth originates from developing regions, particularly Asia, where international education is increasingly perceived as a strategic pathway to enhanced employment prospects, global exposure, and upward socio-economic mobility (OECD, 2022). In many destination countries, international education is closely integrated with labour market participation through work-study arrangements, post-study work visas, and opportunities for longer-term migration. As a result, international student migration has increasingly become intertwined with broader migration systems and labour market dynamics rather than remaining solely an academic pursuit (Findlay et al., 2017; Robertson, 2013).

Nepal provides a particularly compelling context for examining these developments. Historically, the country has experienced high levels of international labour migration, which has played a central role in household livelihoods and the national economy. Migration to India, the Gulf countries, and Malaysia has long been a dominant economic strategy for Nepali households, with remittances contributing substantially to national income and poverty reduction (World Bank, 2023; International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2019). However, alongside labour migration, Nepal has witnessed a rapid rise in educational migration over the past decade. Increasing numbers of Nepali students are enrolling in universities and vocational institutions abroad, particularly in countries such as Australia, Japan, the United Kingdom, and Canada. Several structural and institutional factors have contributed to this shift. First, rising aspirations among young people and their families have increased demand for international education as a pathway to improved career opportunities and global exposure. Second, perceived limitations within the domestic higher education system—including concerns about educational quality, limited research infrastructure, and restricted employment opportunities after graduation—have encouraged many students to seek alternatives abroad (British Council, 2022). Third, migration policies in several destination countries have created accessible work-study pathways that allow international students to combine education with part-time employment and potential post-study settlement opportunities. These policy frameworks have transformed international education into a hybrid mobility channel that simultaneously provides access to education and labour markets (Robertson, 2013; Findlay et al., 2017).

The expansion of student migration is particularly visible in Nepal's Sudurpaschim Province, historically known as the Far Western Development Region. This region has long been characterized by limited economic opportunities, underdeveloped infrastructure, and geographical isolation. These structural conditions have historically contributed to high levels

of labour migration, particularly to neighbouring India, facilitated by the open border between the two countries. Previous studies have shown that migration from the Far Western region is strongly shaped by geographic accessibility, economic necessity, and established migration networks (Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). For many households in the region, migration has functioned as a critical livelihood strategy in the absence of sufficient local employment opportunities. These historical migration patterns provide important context for understanding the contemporary rise of educational migration. Although the destinations and mechanisms of migration have evolved, the underlying motivations for mobility—economic security, employment opportunities, and social advancement—remain central to migration decision-making processes. Educational migration therefore represents, in many ways, an extension or transformation of earlier labour migration strategies. Rather than migrating directly for manual or low-skilled labour, young people increasingly pursue overseas education as a structured and socially legitimate pathway to international labour markets and long-term mobility opportunities.

Despite the growing significance of educational migration, scholarly research on student mobility from Nepal remains relatively limited. Much of the existing literature on Nepalese migration focuses primarily on labour migration, remittances, and household livelihoods, with comparatively less attention given to the dynamics of student migration and its implications for higher education systems and youth mobility (Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). Moreover, studies of international education often conceptualize student mobility primarily as academic exchange or human capital development, without adequately considering its connections to labour migration, settlement strategies, and broader migration systems (King & Raghuram, 2013). In practice, however, the boundaries between education and migration are increasingly blurred. Many students pursue overseas education not solely for academic advancement but also as a strategic pathway to employment, economic security, and international mobility. The increasing prominence of work-study migration pathways suggests that educational migration may function as a hybrid mobility strategy combining elements of both education and labour migration.

Against this background, this study aims to examine the key drivers of student migration from Nepal and to assess whether overseas education functions primarily as an academic pursuit or as a pathway to employment and broader migration opportunities. Specifically, the study addresses three key research questions:

1. What factors motivate Nepali students to pursue education abroad?
2. How do social networks, institutions, and migration infrastructures shape migration decisions and destination choices?
3. What are the socio-economic consequences of student migration for individuals, households, and educational institutions in Nepal?

By integrating quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from migrant-intending students and education consultancies, this study provides a comprehensive analysis of educational migration as a complex and evolving form of international mobility. The findings contribute to the growing literature on international student migration by highlighting how education increasingly functions not only as a form of human capital development but also as a strategic pathway for accessing global labour markets and migration opportunities.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Theories of International Migration

Migration has long been a central topic in social science research, and scholars have developed various theoretical frameworks to explain why people migrate and how migration systems evolve over time. One of the most influential theoretical perspectives is Migration Network Theory, which emphasizes the role of social networks in facilitating and sustaining migration flows. According to this perspective, interpersonal connections between migrants and non-migrants—such as relatives, friends, and community members—provide information, resources, and support that reduce the economic and psychological costs of migration (Massey et al., 1993). Once migration networks are established, they create self-reinforcing processes that encourage further migration by lowering uncertainty and barriers for potential migrants (Massey & Zenteno, 1999). Migration networks are particularly important in contexts where migration opportunities are unevenly distributed or where individuals have limited access to reliable information about migration procedures and opportunities. Through social ties, prospective migrants gain knowledge about destinations, employment opportunities, visa processes, and living conditions abroad. In many developing countries, these networks play a crucial role in shaping migration aspirations and destination choices (de Haas, 2010). In the context of educational migration, migration networks can influence students' decisions regarding where to study, which programs to pursue, and how to navigate application and visa processes.

Another widely used framework in migration studies is Human Capital Theory, which conceptualizes migration as a rational investment decision made by individuals or households seeking to maximize expected economic returns (Sjaastad, 1962). From this perspective, migration occurs when the anticipated benefits—such as higher wages, improved employment opportunities, and better living conditions—outweigh the costs associated with moving. Education plays a central role in this framework, as it enhances individuals' skills and productivity, thereby increasing their potential earnings in the labour market. Applied to the context of international student mobility, Human Capital Theory suggests that studying abroad represents a strategic investment aimed at acquiring internationally recognized qualifications, improving employability, and accessing global labour markets (Findlay et al., 2017). For students from developing countries, international education can also provide access to advanced training, professional networks, and employment opportunities that may not be available in their home countries.

In recent years, migration scholars have also highlighted the concept of migration infrastructure, which refers to the complex system of institutions, actors, and regulatory frameworks that facilitate and shape migration processes (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). Migration infrastructure includes government policies, recruitment agencies, education consultancies, language institutes, financial institutions, and transportation networks that collectively enable and regulate migration flows. These intermediaries play a significant role in structuring migration opportunities by providing services such as visa processing, educational counseling, recruitment, and logistical support. In the case of student migration, migration infrastructure is particularly visible through the role of education consultancies and recruitment agencies, which often guide students through application procedures, language training, and visa processes.

These actors act as brokers between students and international education institutions, effectively shaping the geography and patterns of student mobility. Consequently, migration decisions are not solely determined by individual motivations but are also influenced by institutional arrangements and intermediaries within migration systems. Taken together, Migration Network Theory, Human Capital Theory, and the concept of migration infrastructure provide complementary frameworks for understanding contemporary student migration. While Human Capital Theory explains the economic motivations behind pursuing international education, Migration Network Theory highlights the social dynamics that facilitate migration, and migration infrastructure emphasizes the institutional and structural factors shaping migration pathways.

2.2 Student Migration and Work–Study Pathways

International student migration has become an increasingly significant component of global migration systems. Traditionally, international education was often associated with elite academic exchange or scholarship-supported mobility. However, over the past few decades, the character of student mobility has changed considerably, with growing numbers of students pursuing education abroad as part of broader migration and employment strategies (King & Raghuram, 2013). Several destination countries—including Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Japan—have introduced policy frameworks that allow international students to work part-time during their studies and to transition into post-study work opportunities after graduation. These policies have transformed international education into a hybrid migration channel that combines education, employment, and potential long-term settlement opportunities (Robertson, 2013). As a result, international students increasingly participate in local labour markets while studying, contributing to both the education sector and the service economy in host countries.

The growing integration of education and labour migration has significantly reshaped students' motivations for studying abroad. Rather than viewing international education purely as an academic endeavor, many students now perceive it as a gateway to global labour markets and improved career opportunities (OECD, 2022). In this context, education serves not only as a means of acquiring knowledge and skills but also as a strategic mechanism for accessing employment, migration status, and long-term residence abroad. Scholars have also emphasized that international student migration often represents a stepping stone toward broader migration trajectories. For many students, studying abroad provides opportunities to establish professional networks, gain local work experience, and potentially transition into permanent migration pathways (Findlay et al., 2017). Consequently, international student mobility has become increasingly embedded within global migration systems rather than functioning as an isolated educational phenomenon.

2.3 Migration from Nepal and the Far Western Region

Nepal has a long history of international migration, with labour migration playing a central role in household livelihoods and the national economy. Migration to India has historically been the most common form of cross-border mobility due to the open border between the two countries, shared cultural ties, and relatively low migration costs (Bhatt, 2025; Seddon et al., 2002). Over time, labour migration expanded to include destinations such as the Gulf countries

and Malaysia, where Nepali workers are employed in construction, manufacturing, and service sectors (Bhatt, 2015; 2024).

Migration has become deeply embedded within Nepal's socio-economic structure, and remittances now constitute a major source of household income and national revenue. According to the World Bank (2023), remittances account for a substantial share of Nepal's gross domestic product, reflecting the importance of migration for economic stability and poverty reduction. Research focusing on Nepal's Far Western Region (Sudurpaschim Province) has highlighted the historical significance of migration as a livelihood strategy. Studies by Bhatt (2015, 2018, 2023) show that migration from this region has been driven largely by limited employment opportunities, weak industrial development, geographic isolation, and inadequate access to higher education and economic infrastructure. Because of these structural constraints, many households have historically relied on seasonal or temporary migration to India as a coping strategy for household survival. Bhatt's research further demonstrates that migration from the Far Western region is strongly shaped by social networks and geographic accessibility. Due to the proximity of the Indo-Nepal border and the relatively low costs associated with cross-border movement, migration to India became a common livelihood strategy among households in districts such as Doti, Achham, and Kanchanpur (Bhatt, 2017). These migration patterns created longstanding migration networks that continue to influence contemporary migration decisions.

Recent studies also indicate that migration patterns from the region are gradually changing. While labour migration to India remains significant, increasing numbers of young people are pursuing educational migration to countries such as Japan, Australia, and the United Kingdom. According to Bhatt (2024, 2025), these shifts reflect changing aspirations among young people as well as evolving migration infrastructures, including the expansion of education consultancies, language training institutions, and visa processing services in urban centers such as Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar. Bhatt's research suggests that educational migration can be understood as an extension of earlier labour migration strategies. Whereas previous generations migrated directly for manual labour, younger migrants increasingly pursue education abroad as a structured pathway to employment and international mobility. This transition reflects both the aspirations of young people and the growing institutionalization of migration pathways through educational channels. Despite the growing scale of student migration from Nepal, academic research on this phenomenon remains relatively limited. Much of the existing literature continues to focus primarily on labour migration and remittance economies (Seddon et al., 2002; Thieme & Wyss, 2005). As a result, the motivations, pathways, and consequences of student migration have received comparatively less scholarly attention. This study contributes to addressing this gap by examining the drivers and consequences of student migration from Nepal, with particular attention to how education functions as a migration strategy among young people.

3.0 METHODOLOGY

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to examine the drivers and consequences of student migration from Nepal. Mixed-methods designs are particularly useful for migration research because they

enable researchers to combine statistical analysis of migration patterns with in-depth insights into migrants' motivations, experiences, and decision-making processes (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component of the study provides empirical evidence on students' socio-demographic characteristics, motivations for migration, destination preferences, and preparation strategies. The qualitative component complements these findings by exploring how students, families, and migration intermediaries interpret educational migration and how social networks and migration infrastructures shape migration decisions. By combining these two approaches, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of student migration as both a statistical phenomenon and a socially embedded process.

3.2 Study Area

The research focuses on Sudurpaschim Province in western Nepal, historically known as the Far Western Development Region. This region has long experienced high levels of labour migration due to limited economic opportunities, geographic isolation, and underdeveloped educational infrastructure. Migration to India has traditionally been a common livelihood strategy among households in this region, facilitated by the open border between Nepal and India (Bhatt, 2015; Seddon et al., 2002). In recent years, however, the region has witnessed a noticeable increase in educational migration, particularly among young people who seek opportunities for higher education and employment abroad. Urban centers such as Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar have emerged as important migration hubs where education consultancies, language institutes, and visa processing services operate. These institutions form part of a broader migration infrastructure that facilitates student mobility from the region.

3.3 Data Collection

Primary Data

Primary data were collected through a survey of 120 students who were preparing to migrate abroad for educational purposes. The respondents were selected from language training centers, IELTS preparation institutes, and education consultancies located in Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar. These locations were selected because they represent key points within the local migration infrastructure where prospective student migrants prepare for international education and visa application processes.

A structured questionnaire was used to collect quantitative data on:

- socio-demographic characteristics
- educational background
- migration motivations
- destination preferences
- sources of information
- financing strategies
- skills and training acquired prior to migration

The questionnaire enabled the study to identify patterns and relationships among key variables influencing student migration decisions.

Qualitative Data

To complement the quantitative survey, qualitative data were collected through focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs). Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were conducted with groups of students preparing for overseas education. These discussions explored students' aspirations, migration motivations, perceived opportunities abroad, and their experiences with migration preparation. In addition, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) were conducted with education consultancy owners and migration intermediaries who assist students in preparing for international education. These interviews provided insights into:

- trends in student migration
- destination preferences
- visa processes and migration pathways
- the role of consultancies in facilitating educational migration

The qualitative data helped capture the social, institutional, and experiential dimensions of student migration, which are often difficult to understand through quantitative data alone.

3.4 Sampling Procedure

The study employed a purposive sampling technique to identify respondents who were actively preparing to migrate abroad for educational purposes. Language training centers and education consultancies served as effective entry points for accessing prospective student migrants. Students enrolled in language preparation courses such as IELTS or Japanese language programs were approached and invited to participate in the survey. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose of the study prior to data collection. The sample of 120 respondents provides a useful representation of students from Sudurpaschim Province who are preparing to pursue higher education abroad.

3.5 Data Analysis

Quantitative data collected through the survey were analyzed using descriptive statistical methods, including frequency distributions and percentage analysis. These techniques were used to examine patterns related to students' socio-demographic characteristics, migration motivations, and destination preferences. In addition, cross-tabulation and chi-square tests were applied to explore potential relationships between variables such as educational level, family income, and destination choice. Qualitative data from FGDs and KIIs were analyzed using thematic analysis. Interview transcripts and discussion notes were carefully reviewed to identify recurring themes related to migration motivations, work–study pathways, migration networks, and institutional influences. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings enabled the study to develop a deeper understanding of the complex factors shaping student migration decisions.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were carefully addressed throughout the research process. Participation in the study was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the purpose and objectives of the research before data collection began. Confidentiality and anonymity of participants

were maintained to protect their privacy. Participants were assured that the information collected would be used solely for academic purposes and that individual responses would not be disclosed to third parties.

3.7 Research Framework / Conceptual Model

This study conceptualizes student migration as a multi-dimensional process influenced by structural conditions, social networks, individual agency, and migration infrastructure. The research framework is informed primarily by Human Capital Theory, Migration Network Theory, and the concept of Migration Infrastructure. From the perspective of Human Capital Theory, individuals invest in education and migration to enhance their skills, productivity, and long-term economic returns (Sjaastad, 1962). In the context of this study, international education represents an investment strategy through which students seek to improve their employment prospects and future earnings. Students' decisions to pursue overseas education are therefore influenced by expectations of better labour market opportunities, higher wages, and improved living standards.

At the same time, Migration Network Theory highlights the importance of social relationships in facilitating migration decisions (Massey et al., 1993). Friends, relatives, and community members who have previously migrated provide information, financial assistance, and practical guidance that reduce the risks and uncertainties associated with migration. These networks play a crucial role in shaping students' migration aspirations, destination choices, and perceptions of opportunities abroad. In addition to social networks, contemporary migration research emphasizes the role of migration infrastructure, which refers to the institutions, intermediaries, and policy environments that facilitate migration processes (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). In the context of educational migration from Nepal, this infrastructure includes education consultancies, language training centers, visa processing services, recruitment agencies, and international universities. These actors act as intermediaries that connect prospective student migrants with educational institutions and migration opportunities abroad.

The research framework of this study therefore integrates three major sets of factors influencing student migration:

1. Structural Push Factors in Nepal

These include limited employment opportunities, perceived weaknesses in domestic higher education institutions, economic insecurity, and regional inequalities. Such conditions encourage students to seek opportunities abroad.

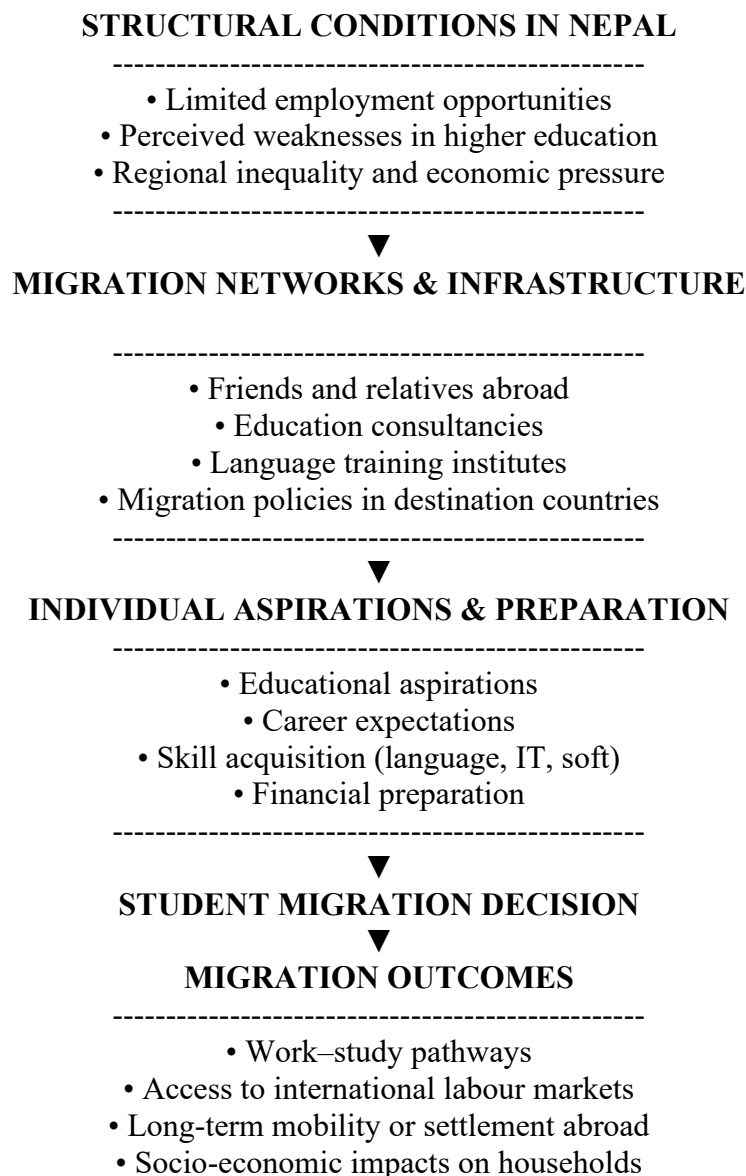
2. Migration Networks and Institutional Support

Social networks, including friends, relatives, and migrant communities, provide information and support that facilitate migration decisions. At the same time, migration intermediaries such as education consultancies and language institutes shape migration pathways by guiding students through application and visa processes.

3. Individual Aspirations and Skill Preparation

Students’ personal motivations, career aspirations, and preparation strategies—including language training, skill development, and financial planning—play a crucial role in shaping migration decisions. These interacting factors influence students’ destination preferences, migration preparedness, and financing strategies, ultimately shaping educational migration outcomes. In many cases, overseas education functions not only as a pathway for academic advancement but also as a strategic mechanism for accessing international labour markets and long-term mobility opportunities. Thus, the conceptual framework of this study views educational migration as a hybrid mobility strategy, situated at the intersection of education, labour migration, and social mobility.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Student Migration from Nepal



4.0 RESULTS

4.1 Socio-Demographic Profile of Respondents

The socio-demographic characteristics of respondents provide important insights into the population preparing for overseas education. The majority of respondents fall within the 20–24 age group, reflecting a critical transitional stage between the completion of secondary education and the pursuit of higher education or early career opportunities. This age group typically represents students who have recently completed +2 education or who are in the early years of undergraduate study and are actively exploring international education pathways.

The gender composition of the sample shows that male students slightly outnumber female students, reflecting broader migration trends observed in Nepal, where male migration has historically been more common. However, the participation of a substantial proportion of female respondents indicates that educational migration is becoming increasingly accessible to women as well. With regard to educational attainment, a significant proportion of respondents reported having completed or currently pursuing bachelor-level education, followed by students who had completed higher secondary education (+2). A smaller share of respondents had completed master's level education. These findings suggest that migration decisions are commonly made during the transition between secondary and tertiary education or during the early stages of higher education.

Overall, the socio-demographic profile indicates that educational migration from Nepal is largely concentrated among young adults with intermediate and undergraduate educational backgrounds, who view overseas education as a pathway for academic advancement and employment opportunities.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents (n = 120)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Age Group</i>	Below 20	15	12.5
	20–24	60	50.0
	25–29	30	25.0
	30+	15	12.5
<i>Gender</i>	Male	72	60.0
	Female	48	40.0
<i>Education Level</i>	+2	36	30.0
	Bachelor	54	45.0
	Master	30	25.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.2 Destination Preferences

The findings reveal a strong concentration of migration intentions toward a limited number of destination countries. Japan emerges as the most preferred destination, accounting for approximately two-thirds of respondents. Other destinations such as Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States attract comparatively smaller proportions of students.

Several factors appear to contribute to the strong preference for Japan. First, Japan provides relatively accessible language-based migration pathways, allowing students to enroll in language schools before transitioning to vocational or higher education programs. Second, international students in Japan are permitted to work part-time during their studies, enabling them to support their living expenses and gain work experience.

Qualitative insights from key informant interviews with education consultancies further indicate that Japan's popularity is reinforced by established Nepali migrant networks, predictable visa procedures, and employment opportunities in sectors such as manufacturing, hospitality, agriculture, and caregiving. These factors collectively make Japan an attractive destination for students seeking both educational and economic opportunities.

Table 2: Preferred destination country for education abroad (n = 120)

<i>Destination Country</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Japan</i>	80	66.7
<i>Australia</i>	14	11.7
<i>United Kingdom</i>	12	10.0
<i>United States</i>	7	5.8
<i>Other Countries</i>	7	5.8
<i>Total</i>	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.3 Migration Motivations

Understanding students' motivations for pursuing overseas education is central to the objectives of this study. The findings show that combined study and work opportunities represent the dominant motivation, cited by more than half of respondents. This suggests that many students perceive overseas education not only as an academic opportunity but also as a pathway to employment and financial stability.

A considerable proportion of respondents identified education as their primary motivation, reflecting aspirations for international academic exposure and improved educational quality. However, a relatively small proportion of respondents reported purely economic motivations, such as migrating solely for employment.

These results indicate that educational migration is increasingly characterized by a hybrid motivation structure, where academic and economic goals are closely intertwined. Students view international education as an opportunity to simultaneously gain qualifications, acquire work experience, and improve long-term career prospects.

Table 3: Primary motivation for pursuing education abroad (n = 120)

<i>Motivation</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Study and Work</i>	66	55.0
<i>Education Only</i>	42	35.0
<i>Work / Economic Motive</i>	12	10.0
<i>Total</i>	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.4 Migration Preparation

Preparation strategies adopted by prospective student migrants reveal important insights into how individuals plan their international education pathways. The results show that language training is the most common preparation strategy, undertaken by a large majority of respondents. This reflects the importance of language proficiency in securing admission to international institutions and integrating into foreign labour markets.

In addition to language training, many students reported acquiring information technology (IT) skills and soft skills, which are increasingly valued in international academic environments and part-time employment sectors. Technical or vocational skills were reported by a smaller proportion of respondents, suggesting that students often prioritize general competencies and language proficiency prior to migration.

These findings highlight that educational migration is a planned and strategic process, requiring preparation in multiple areas including language ability, technical competence, and financial readiness.

Table 4: Skills and training acquired prior to migration (n = 120)

<i>Skill Type</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Language Skills</i>	100	83.3
<i>IT / Computer Skills</i>	64	53.3
<i>Soft Skills</i>	54	45.0
<i>Technical Skills</i>	36	30.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

4.5 Role of Social Networks and Financial Support

Social networks play a crucial role in shaping migration decisions and facilitating access to information about overseas education. The results show that friends and relatives are the most influential sources of information, reflecting the importance of migration networks in sustaining student mobility. These networks provide first-hand knowledge about application procedures, living conditions, and employment opportunities abroad.

Electronic media, including social media platforms and online resources, also represent a significant source of information for students seeking opportunities abroad. In contrast, formal institutional channels such as education fairs or seminars appear to play a comparatively smaller role.

Table 5: Sources of information about study/work abroad (n = 120)

<i>Source of Information</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Friends</i>	30	25.0
<i>Relatives</i>	24	20.0
<i>Electronic Media</i>	20	16.7
<i>Parents</i>	18	15.0
<i>Teachers/Professors</i>	14	11.7
<i>Newspapers</i>	8	6.6
<i>Consultancies/Seminars</i>	6	5.0

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Financial support is another key factor influencing students' ability to pursue education abroad. The results indicate that parents remain the primary source of financing, accounting for the largest proportion of respondents.

Table 6: Source of financing for education abroad (n = 120)

<i>Source of Financing</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percentage (%)</i>
<i>Parents</i>	46	38.3
<i>Scholarships</i>	30	25.0
<i>Self-earning through work abroad</i>	24	20.0
<i>Relatives abroad</i>	20	16.7
<i>Total</i>	120	100

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Scholarships and part-time employment abroad also represent important financial strategies, while support from relatives living overseas provides additional assistance for some students. These findings highlight the collective and family-based nature of educational migration decisions, where household resources and social networks play an important role in facilitating international education.

4.6 Association between Education Level and Destination Choice

To examine whether students' educational level influences their preferred destination country, a Chi-square test of independence was conducted. The cross-tabulation results indicate that students from different educational backgrounds show broadly similar destination preferences, with Japan remaining the dominant destination across all education levels.

Table 7: Education level by preferred destination country (n = 120)

<i>Education Level</i>	<i>Japan</i>	<i>Australia</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>USA</i>	<i>Other</i>	<i>Total</i>
+2	26	4	3	1	2	36
<i>Bachelor</i>	37	6	6	3	2	54
<i>Master</i>	17	4	3	3	3	30
<i>Total</i>	80	14	12	7	7	120

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Chi-square test

<i>Test</i>	<i>Value</i>
<i>Chi-square (χ^2)</i>	7.12
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	8
<i>p-value</i>	0.52

The Chi-square test result shows that the relationship between education level and destination choice is not statistically significant ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that students' destination preferences are relatively similar regardless of their educational level. Instead of educational background, other factors such as migration networks, work opportunities, and migration infrastructure may play a more important role in shaping destination decisions.

4.7 Association between Family Income and Migration Motivation

A Chi-square test was also conducted to examine whether students' family income level influences their migration motivations.

Table 8: Family income by migration motivation (n = 120)

<i>Family Income (NPR/month)</i>	<i>Study & Work</i>	<i>Education Only</i>	<i>Work Motive</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Below 50,000</i>	34	20	6	60
<i>50,000–99,999</i>	22	14	4	40
<i>Above 100,000</i>	10	8	2	20
<i>Total</i>	66	42	12	120

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Chi-square test

<i>Test</i>	<i>Value</i>
<i>Chi-square (χ^2)</i>	3.46
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	4
<i>p-value</i>	0.48

The Chi-square test indicates no statistically significant association between family income and migration motivation ($p > 0.05$). This finding suggests that the desire to pursue overseas education is widespread across different income groups. Even students from relatively modest economic backgrounds aspire to study abroad, often relying on family support, scholarships, or part-time work opportunities.

4.8 Association between Age Group and Migration Motivation

A final Chi-square test was conducted to explore whether migration motivations vary across different age groups.

Table 9: Age group by migration motivation (n = 120)

<i>Age Group</i>	<i>Study & Work</i>	<i>Education Only</i>	<i>Work Motive</i>	<i>Total</i>
<i>Below 20</i>	7	6	2	15
<i>20–24</i>	36	20	4	60
<i>25–29</i>	15	11	4	30
<i>30+</i>	8	5	2	15
<i>Total</i>	66	42	12	120

Source: Field Survey, 2025.

Chi-square test

<i>Test</i>	<i>Value</i>
<i>Chi-square (χ^2)</i>	4.08
<i>Degrees of Freedom</i>	6
<i>p-value</i>	0.66

The results again indicate no statistically significant relationship between age group and migration motivation ($p > 0.05$). Students across different age categories share similar aspirations, particularly the desire to combine education with employment opportunities abroad. The Chi-square analyses reveal that destination preference, migration motivation, and educational background are not significantly associated with demographic variables such as age or family income. These findings suggest that educational migration aspirations are broadly shared among students and are shaped more strongly by migration networks, institutional pathways, and perceived labour market opportunities abroad than by individual socio-demographic characteristics.

5.0 DISCUSSION**5.1 Educational Migration as a Livelihood Strategy**

The findings of this study highlight the increasing transformation of educational migration into a livelihood and mobility strategy among Nepali youth. A majority of respondents indicated that their primary motivation for studying abroad was the opportunity to combine education with employment, rather than pursuing academic advancement alone. This pattern suggests that overseas education is often perceived as a pathway to economic security, employment opportunities, and long-term mobility. This finding aligns with broader scholarship on international student mobility, which emphasizes that contemporary student migration increasingly intersects with labour migration and global labour markets. International education is no longer limited to academic exchange but has become closely linked to employment opportunities, post-study work visas, and potential pathways to permanent settlement (King & Raghuram, 2013; OECD, 2022). Similarly, Robertson (2013) argues that the education–migration nexus has fundamentally reshaped international mobility, enabling students to use educational pathways as a mechanism for accessing labour markets and long-term migration opportunities. The results of this study also resonate with Human Capital Theory, which conceptualizes migration as a rational investment in education and skills aimed at improving future earnings and career prospects (Sjaastad, 1962). For many students in this study, overseas education represents a strategic investment that enhances employability in international labour markets and increases the likelihood of upward socio-economic mobility.

5.2 The Role of Migration Networks

Another important finding of this study is the strong influence of social networks in shaping migration decisions. The results indicate that friends and relatives constitute the primary sources of information about study and work opportunities abroad. These networks provide practical knowledge about migration procedures, living conditions, employment opportunities,

and visa processes. This finding strongly supports Migration Network Theory, which emphasizes the role of interpersonal relationships in facilitating migration by reducing costs and uncertainties (Massey et al., 1993). Once migration networks are established, they create self-reinforcing migration systems that encourage further mobility within the same communities and regions (Massey & Zenteno, 1999). In the context of educational migration, these networks play a crucial role in shaping destination choices, migration aspirations, and perceptions of opportunities abroad. The importance of social networks observed in this study is also consistent with research on migration from developing countries, which demonstrates that migrant networks often serve as informal channels for information exchange and support (de Haas, 2010). Through these networks, prospective migrants gain access to knowledge about educational institutions, labour markets, and migration pathways in destination countries.

5.3 Migration Infrastructure and Destination Choice

In addition to social networks, the study highlights the importance of migration infrastructure in shaping student migration patterns. The strong concentration of respondents choosing Japan as their preferred destination reflects the role of education consultancies, language training centers, and migration intermediaries in facilitating migration pathways. Migration scholars have increasingly emphasized the concept of migration infrastructure, which refers to the institutional and organizational arrangements that enable and regulate migration flows (Xiang & Lindquist, 2014). This infrastructure includes recruitment agencies, education consultancies, language institutes, and government policies that collectively structure migration opportunities. The findings of this study demonstrate that education consultancies and language training institutes in urban centers such as Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar act as important intermediaries connecting students with international education systems. These institutions provide guidance on destination selection, visa applications, and language preparation, thereby reducing the complexity of migration processes for prospective students. The clustering of destination preferences around Japan also reflects broader patterns observed in international migration research, where established migration pathways tend to become self-reinforcing due to the presence of migrant communities and institutional support systems (Findlay et al., 2017).

5.4 Regional Context: Migration from Far Western Nepal

The findings of this study must also be interpreted within the historical migration context of Sudurpaschim Province, historically known as the Far Western Development Region of Nepal. Previous research has shown that migration has long served as a crucial livelihood strategy in this region due to limited economic opportunities, geographic isolation, and underdeveloped infrastructure (Bhatt, 2015; Bhatt, 2024). Bhatt's studies on migration in Far Western Nepal highlight that many households historically relied on labour migration to India because of the open border, low migration costs, and geographic accessibility (Bhatt, 2017; Bhatt, 2023). Migration to India was often perceived as a necessary survival strategy for households facing limited local employment opportunities. The findings of the present study suggest that educational migration can be understood as an evolution of these earlier migration patterns. While previous generations migrated primarily for manual labour, younger migrants increasingly pursue education abroad as a structured pathway to employment and international mobility. Bhatt (2024, 2025) notes that migration aspirations in the region have gradually shifted toward skill-based and education-oriented mobility, reflecting changing economic

opportunities and global migration systems. Furthermore, the emergence of education consultancies and language institutes in regional urban centers such as Dhangadhi and Mahendranagar has made international education more accessible to students from peripheral districts. These local institutions reduce the need for students to travel to Kathmandu for migration processing, thereby lowering costs and increasing access to overseas education pathways.

5.5 Skill Preparation and Migration Planning

The study also demonstrates that educational migration is a carefully planned process involving skill acquisition and preparation. The dominance of language training among respondents highlights the importance of linguistic competence in accessing international education systems and labour markets. Language proficiency is often a prerequisite for admission to foreign institutions and plays a crucial role in students' ability to integrate into host societies and labour markets. The emphasis on language skills observed in this study therefore reflects the strategic preparation undertaken by students prior to migration. These findings are consistent with previous research indicating that international students increasingly engage in skill-oriented preparation strategies, including language training, digital skills development, and soft skill acquisition, in order to enhance their competitiveness in global education and employment environments (OECD, 2022).

5.6 Household Investment and Financial Strategies

The results also reveal that parents remain the primary source of financing for overseas education, highlighting the collective and family-centered nature of migration decisions in Nepal. Families often view international education as a long-term investment aimed at improving future economic opportunities for their children. This pattern is consistent with the predictions of Human Capital Theory, which suggests that households invest in education when they expect future economic returns in the form of higher wages and improved employment prospects (Sjaastad, 1962). At the same time, the involvement of relatives abroad in financing migration demonstrates the importance of transnational family networks in facilitating educational mobility. Research on migration in developing countries similarly highlights the role of household strategies and family resources in supporting international education (World Bank, 2023). In many cases, families combine savings, loans, scholarships, and anticipated student earnings abroad to finance educational migration.

5.7 Implications for Nepal's Education and Migration Systems

The findings of this study have several broader implications for Nepal's education system and migration policies. First, the growing popularity of educational migration suggests that many young people perceive limited opportunities within domestic higher education institutions and labour markets. This perception may contribute to declining enrollment in Nepali universities and the outflow of skilled human capital. Second, the strong role of migration networks and consultancies highlights the need for improved regulation and oversight of migration intermediaries to ensure that students receive accurate information and adequate support. Finally, the study suggests that educational migration from Nepal should not be viewed solely as an academic phenomenon but rather as part of a broader education–migration–employment

nexus. Understanding this nexus is essential for developing policies that balance international mobility with domestic educational development and employment opportunities.

6.0 CONSEQUENCES OF STUDENT MIGRATION

The rapid expansion of student migration from Nepal has generated a range of social, economic, and institutional consequences that affect individuals, households, educational institutions, and the national economy. While international education provides opportunities for global exposure, skill development, and transnational connectivity, it also raises concerns regarding brain drain, declining domestic university enrollment, and significant capital outflows. In the context of Nepal—particularly in peripheral regions such as Sudurpaschim Province—these consequences must also be understood in relation to the long-standing history of labour migration documented in several studies by Bhatt (2015, 2018, 2023, 2025). These studies demonstrate that migration has historically functioned as a key livelihood strategy in Far Western Nepal, shaping household economic decisions, social aspirations, and mobility patterns. The growing trend of student migration can therefore be interpreted as a continuation and transformation of earlier migration dynamics.

6.1 Positive Consequences

6.1.1 Global Exposure and Knowledge Exchange

One of the most significant benefits of student migration is the opportunity for global exposure and cross-cultural learning. Studying abroad enables students to interact with diverse academic environments, cultural practices, and professional systems, thereby broadening their perspectives and enhancing their adaptability in global labour markets. International education also facilitates the transfer of knowledge, technology, and professional practices across borders, which can contribute to the development of human capital in the students' country of origin (King & Raghuram, 2013). For Nepali students, overseas education often provides access to advanced learning resources, modern research facilities, and globally recognized academic programs that may not always be available within domestic universities. Exposure to such environments can enhance both academic competence and professional confidence. When graduates return to Nepal, they may introduce new skills, ideas, and professional standards that contribute to innovation and institutional development. In the context of Far Western Nepal, Bhatt (2015) observed that migration has historically served as a mechanism for expanding social and economic horizons for communities with limited local opportunities. Although earlier forms of migration were largely labour-oriented, the emerging trend of educational migration similarly exposes young people to global knowledge systems and professional practices, potentially enabling them to contribute to local development upon return.

6.1.2 Skill Development and Human Capital Formation

Student migration also contributes to the development of human capital through skill acquisition. The findings of this study indicate that many students engage in structured preparation activities before migrating, particularly through language training, digital literacy development, and soft skills such as communication and teamwork. These competencies are increasingly valued in international labour markets and can significantly enhance employability. Such findings are consistent with Human Capital Theory, which conceptualizes

education and migration as investments designed to improve individuals' productivity and long-term earning potential (Sjaastad, 1962). Overseas education provides opportunities for students to acquire new academic knowledge, technical expertise, and practical work experience that can strengthen their career prospects. Bhatt's research on labour migration in Far Western Nepal similarly highlights how migration often contributes to the accumulation of skills and experience among migrants. For example, Bhatt (2018) documented how returnee migrants from India often acquired practical skills and work experience that improved their socio-economic conditions upon returning home. The shift from labour migration to educational migration can therefore be interpreted as an evolution in the types of skills and knowledge migrants seek to acquire.

6.1.3 Expansion of Transnational Networks

Another important benefit of student migration is the development of transnational social and professional networks. Students studying abroad often build connections with peers, faculty members, employers, and migrant communities in host countries. These networks can provide valuable resources such as information, employment opportunities, academic collaborations, and business partnerships. Migration scholars have long emphasized the role of networks in facilitating economic and social mobility across borders (Massey et al., 1993). For Nepali students, maintaining connections with international networks may create opportunities for future collaboration, entrepreneurship, and knowledge exchange. Bhatt (2018) notes that migration from Far Western Nepal has historically been sustained through strong interpersonal networks linking migrants and their home communities. These networks not only facilitate migration but also support the circulation of resources, information, and opportunities. In the context of student migration, similar network dynamics appear to be emerging, as students rely on friends, relatives, and former migrants to navigate overseas education pathways.

6.2 Negative Consequences

6.2.1 Brain Drain and Loss of Skilled Human Resources

Despite these benefits, the rapid growth of student migration also raises concerns about brain drain, particularly if a large proportion of graduates remain abroad after completing their education. When highly educated individuals settle permanently in foreign countries, their home country may experience a loss of skilled human capital that could otherwise contribute to national development. In Nepal, this concern has become increasingly prominent as more young people pursue education abroad and subsequently enter foreign labour markets. The departure of highly educated individuals may create shortages of skilled professionals in key sectors such as education, health care, engineering, and technology. Bhatt's research on migration in Far Western Nepal provides important insights into this issue. Bhatt (2023) observed that long-term labour migration from the region often resulted in the outflow of productive labour, which sometimes weakened local economic activities and community development. While educational migration involves different skill sets and motivations, the potential loss of educated youth may similarly affect local development prospects if return migration remains limited. At the same time, some scholars argue that the negative impacts of brain drain may be offset through brain circulation, where migrants maintain connections with their home country through remittances, investments, and knowledge transfer (de Haas, 2010).

Nonetheless, the long-term implications of sustained educational migration for Nepal's human capital remain a critical policy concern.

6.2.2 Declining Enrollment in Domestic Universities

Another consequence of increasing student migration is the potential decline in enrollment in domestic higher education institutions. As more students choose to pursue education abroad, universities and colleges in Nepal may face difficulties attracting and retaining talented students. This trend may weaken the academic environment within domestic institutions by reducing the diversity of perspectives and intellectual engagement among students. It may also create financial challenges for universities that rely heavily on student enrollment for operational sustainability. Bhatt (2018) highlighted how migration aspirations in Far Western Nepal have historically shaped educational and occupational choices among young people. In many cases, students view migration as a more attractive pathway to economic advancement than local employment opportunities. The growing popularity of international education suggests that this perception may now extend to the higher education sector, potentially influencing enrollment patterns within Nepali universities.

6.2.2 Capital Outflow and Household Financial Pressure

Student migration also has significant economic implications, particularly in terms of capital outflow. Overseas education typically requires substantial financial investment, including tuition fees, living expenses, travel costs, and visa processing charges. As increasing numbers of students transfer funds to foreign educational institutions, this can contribute to large outflows of foreign currency from Nepal. At the household level, financing international education often involves considerable financial commitment. Families may rely on savings, loans, or remittances from relatives working abroad to support students' migration. While these investments may generate long-term benefits if students secure well-paying jobs, they can also create financial stress if expected outcomes are not realized. Bhatt (2025) notes that migration decisions in Far Western Nepal are often shaped by household-level economic strategies aimed at improving long-term livelihood security. Families frequently invest significant resources in migration with the expectation of future returns. Educational migration appears to follow a similar pattern, where households treat overseas education as an investment in future economic mobility.

6.3 Broader Social and Developmental Implications

Beyond these economic and institutional consequences, student migration also has broader social implications. Exposure to international environments can influence students' aspirations, values, and expectations regarding education, employment, and quality of life. Such experiences may contribute to the diffusion of new ideas and practices within Nepali society. However, the growing normalization of migration as a pathway to success may also reinforce the perception that opportunities within Nepal are limited. Bhatt (2015, 2019) observed that migration has become deeply embedded in the socio-economic fabric of Far Western Nepal, where overseas employment is often viewed as an essential strategy for achieving social and economic mobility.

The increasing prevalence of student migration may therefore contribute to the emergence of a migration culture, where international mobility becomes the preferred pathway for young people seeking advancement. While this trend may offer significant opportunities for individuals, it may also create challenges for national development if domestic education systems and labour markets struggle to retain skilled youth. In summary, student migration from Nepal generates a combination of positive and negative consequences. On the positive side, international education provides opportunities for global exposure, skill development, and the formation of transnational networks that can enhance human capital. On the negative side, it may contribute to brain drain, declining enrollment in domestic universities, and substantial capital outflow. The research carried out by Bhatt (2015, 2018, 2023, 2025) on migration in Far Western Nepal demonstrates that migration has long functioned as a key livelihood strategy in the region. The contemporary rise of student migration can therefore be interpreted as an extension of these historical mobility patterns, where education increasingly serves as a structured pathway to international employment and socio-economic advancement. Understanding both the benefits and challenges associated with student migration is essential for developing policies that maximize the positive impacts of global mobility while strengthening domestic education systems and retaining skilled human capital within Nepal.

7.0 CONCLUSION AND POLICY IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Conclusion

This study set out to examine the drivers and consequences of student migration from Nepal, with a particular focus on whether overseas education functions primarily as an academic pursuit or as a broader pathway to employment and international mobility. Using a mixed-methods research design combining survey data from 120 prospective migrant students and qualitative insights from focus group discussions and interviews with education consultants, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of contemporary educational migration patterns. The findings reveal that student migration from Nepal—especially from Sudurpaschim Province—should be understood not simply as academic mobility but as a strategic migration pathway embedded within wider socio-economic and migration systems. The results indicate that educational migration is closely linked to employment aspirations. More than half of the respondents identified the opportunity to combine study with work as their primary motivation for going abroad. This suggests that international education is increasingly perceived as a gateway to labour markets and long-term mobility rather than solely as a means of acquiring academic qualifications. Such findings reflect broader global trends in which student mobility intersects with labour migration systems and migration policies that permit part-time work and post-study employment opportunities (King & Raghuram, 2013; OECD, 2022).

The study also highlights the critical role of migration networks and migration infrastructure in shaping students' decisions. Friends, relatives, and former migrants emerged as the most influential sources of information about study and work opportunities abroad, confirming the central propositions of Migration Network Theory (Massey et al., 1993). These networks reduce uncertainty, provide practical knowledge about migration procedures, and reinforce migration aspirations within communities. At the same time, institutions such as education consultancies and language training centers function as important intermediaries connecting

prospective students with international education systems. Destination preferences observed in this study reveal a strong clustering around Japan, followed by Australia and the United Kingdom. Qualitative evidence suggests that Japan's popularity is associated with language-based migration pathways, accessible work opportunities, and relatively predictable visa processes. These factors illustrate how migration decisions are often shaped by practical feasibility rather than by abstract perceptions of academic prestige.

Another important finding concerns the strategic preparation undertaken by students prior to migration. Language training emerged as the most common preparation strategy, followed by the development of digital skills and soft skills. This indicates that educational migration is not a spontaneous decision but rather a carefully planned process involving skill acquisition and preparation. Such patterns support Human Capital Theory, which conceptualizes migration as an investment aimed at improving future productivity and earning potential (Sjaastad, 1962). The findings of this study must also be interpreted within the broader historical context of migration from Far Western Nepal. Research conducted by Bhatt (2015, 2018, 2023, 2024, 2025) demonstrates that migration has long served as a central livelihood strategy in Sudurpaschim Province. Historically, many households relied on labour migration to India due to geographic proximity, open borders, and limited local employment opportunities. The emergence of educational migration can therefore be understood as a transformation of these earlier migration patterns. While previous generations migrated primarily for manual labour, contemporary youth increasingly pursue education abroad as a structured pathway to employment and social mobility.

Despite its potential benefits, student migration also generates several challenges. The study identifies concerns related to brain drain, declining enrollment in domestic universities, and significant capital outflows associated with overseas education. The departure of highly educated youth may weaken Nepal's human capital base if graduates remain abroad permanently. Similarly, the increasing preference for foreign universities may reduce enrollment in domestic institutions, potentially affecting the sustainability and competitiveness of Nepal's higher education system. At the same time, the consequences of student migration should not be viewed solely in negative terms. International education provides opportunities for skill development, global exposure, and the formation of transnational networks that can contribute to knowledge exchange and economic development. Migrants who maintain connections with their home country may contribute through remittances, investments, and professional collaborations. Thus, educational migration can potentially contribute to brain circulation rather than brain drain, provided appropriate policies and institutional mechanisms are in place. Overall, the findings of this study suggest that student migration from Nepal represents a hybrid form of mobility that integrates education, employment, and migration aspirations. Rather than viewing international education as an isolated phenomenon, it should be understood as part of a broader education–migration–employment nexus that reflects structural economic conditions, social networks, and institutional mediation.

7.2 Policy Implications

The findings of this study have several important implications for policymakers, educational institutions, and migration governance in Nepal.

First, there is a need to strengthen the quality and competitiveness of domestic higher education institutions. The growing preference for overseas education reflects students' perceptions that foreign universities provide better academic resources, international recognition, and employment opportunities. Improving the quality of teaching, research infrastructure, and industry linkages within Nepali universities could help retain talented students and reduce excessive dependence on overseas education pathways. Second, policymakers should consider developing policies that promote international collaboration and academic mobility within Nepal's higher education system. Partnerships with foreign universities, joint degree programs, and international research collaborations could provide students with global exposure without requiring full migration. Such initiatives could help balance the benefits of international education with the need to strengthen domestic institutions.

Third, the role of education consultancies and migration intermediaries requires careful regulation and oversight. While these institutions play an important role in facilitating migration pathways, there are concerns about misinformation, financial exploitation, and unrealistic expectations among prospective students. Establishing clear regulatory frameworks and monitoring mechanisms could ensure that students receive accurate information and ethical guidance regarding overseas education opportunities. Fourth, policies should be developed to encourage return migration and knowledge transfer. Creating professional opportunities for returning graduates, recognizing foreign qualifications, and supporting entrepreneurship among returnees could help harness the skills and experiences gained abroad. Incentives such as research grants, startup funding, and professional networks could encourage graduates to contribute to Nepal's economic and institutional development.

Fifth, the government should address the issue of capital outflow associated with international education. While overseas education can generate long-term benefits, the large amounts of foreign currency spent on tuition fees and living expenses abroad represent a significant financial burden for both households and the national economy. Expanding scholarship opportunities, improving domestic educational quality, and promoting affordable international partnerships could help reduce these financial pressures. Finally, migration policies should recognize that educational migration is closely linked to broader labour market dynamics and youth employment challenges. The growing popularity of overseas education reflects limited employment opportunities within Nepal's domestic economy. Addressing youth unemployment, promoting skill development, and expanding economic opportunities at home could help create viable alternatives to migration.

7.3 Directions for Future Research

Although this study provides valuable insights into student migration from Nepal, several areas require further research. Future studies could explore the long-term outcomes of educational migration, including the career trajectories of graduates and their contributions to Nepal's economy. Longitudinal research examining the experiences of return migrants would also provide important insights into the potential for knowledge transfer and brain circulation. In addition, comparative studies across different provinces of Nepal could help identify regional variations in migration aspirations and mobility patterns. Given the unique historical migration context of Sudurpaschim Province, examining student migration in other regions could provide a more comprehensive understanding of national migration dynamics. Finally, further research should examine the role of gender, socio-economic background, and educational inequality in

shaping student migration opportunities. Understanding these dimensions would contribute to more inclusive and equitable migration policies.

In conclusion, student migration from Nepal reflects broader transformations in global mobility systems where education increasingly functions as a pathway to employment, migration, and social mobility. While overseas education provides valuable opportunities for individuals, it also raises important challenges for Nepal's education system and labour market. Recognizing the complex relationship between education and migration is essential for developing policies that maximize the benefits of international mobility while strengthening domestic educational institutions and economic opportunities. By addressing these challenges, Nepal can transform educational migration from a potential source of brain drain into a strategic resource for national development and global engagement.

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