UNDERSTANDING INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY FROM A DEVELOPING NATION'S PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

The international student mobility sector has expanded into a significant financial enterprise, producing more than USD 500 billion globally each year. Students from emerging economies are increasingly preferring to study abroad, as the global higher education sector has developed considerably. Asian students make for most of the worldwide demand for international higher education. With over one million international students enrolled, China is the largest source market and has been a market leader for the greater part of two decades. With student enrollments expected to expand at an 8.5 percent compound annual rate from 2019 to 2030, India is the second-fastest growing source market. Bangladesh, Vietnam, and Indonesia are among the other quickly rising Asian economies. By 2025, there will be around twenty-five million foreign students studying outside of their home countries, based on current yearly growth rates. The vast majority of overseas students' study in anglophone countries. The United Kingdom, the United States, and Australia, for example, welcome more than 40% of all international students worldwide. Several factors, such as demographic shifts, rising affordability and family incomes, poor quality of local education provision, increased access to global education, higher salaries for international graduates, and a strong proclivity to seek a better life in Anglophone countries, are all contributing to this impressive growth. From a Sri Lankan viewpoint, this essay will examine student migration data and driving forces.

Keywords *– International Student Mobility (ISM), Higher Education, Student Mobility Trends, Growth Rate*

INTRODUCTION

This era has begun to study education beyond national lines, resulting in increased demand for higher education and student mobility. Many international students travel between countries, enticing the interest of governments and educational establishments (Perkins and Neumayer, 2014). Some educators focus on the educational content, instructional strategies, and cultural receptivity of international students, viewing international student mobility (ISM) as a learning behavior in a specific educational setting (Sherry, Thomas, and Chui 2010; Zhao, Kuh, and Carini 2005). ISM, on the other hand, goes beyond being a part of higher education. ISM is a part of globalization, according to a growing body of study, and consists of more complex global networks of intellectual, business, and cultural ties (Findlay et al. 2012; Kehm 2005). Each year, Anglophone countries enroll 2.5 million-3 million overseas students, out of a total of 5 million international students (Laad and Sharma, 2021).

Most foreign students go to a few important destination markets, the most notable of which are Anglophone countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, Australia, and Canada. According to UNESCO's Institute for Statistics, Student mobility for higher education in the United States of America is predicted to rise substantially quicker in the next years, although enrollment growth was 1 to 2% per year between 2014 and 2019. Enrollment growth is expected to be 5% per year between 2019 and 2030. Enrolment growth in Canada is also expected to increase, although not at the same rate as in the past; enrollment growth between 2014 and 2019 was 14% to 16% per year; however, enrollment growth between 2019 and 2030 is predicted to be 7% to 8%. The movement to the United Kingdom is expected to grow significantly faster than in other anglophone countries, where enrollment growth from 2014 – 2019 was 1% - 2% per annum, however, it is estimated to have a growth rate of 5% - 6% per annum between the years 2019 – 2030. Finally, while Australia has been a popular study destination in the past, demand is predicted to slow down. Enrollment growth between 2014 – 2019 was 10% to 12% per annum. However estimated enrollment growth between 2019 – 2030 would reach 5% to 6% per annum (Laad and Sharma, 2021).

Global student mobility patterns are projected to remain generally steady notwithstanding alterations at both ends of the value chain (supply and demand). Leading Anglophone countries will continue looking to Asia for international students, and this trend will only increase. Value creation opportunities for investors and entrepreneurs will arise as these markets proceed along the enrolment trend development curve. In recent times, international student mobility has been considered a measure of campus diversity, internationalization, and a primary source of funding for institutions of higher education in key destinations (Bista, Sharma, Gaulee, 2018). Education migration is one of the major migrant outflows from Sri Lanka. Secondary statistics show that student migration from Sri Lanka increased between 2013 and 2017 (UNESCO, 2020). Outbound mobility in Sri Lankan tertiary education increased by 48.95 percent from 5.4 percent in 2013 to 8.0 percent in 2018. Outbound mobility in tertiary education increased by 33.69 percent in 2018 after falling by 12.49 percent in 2012 (Knoema, 2022) With a predicted annual increase of 4.5 percent through 2027, Sri Lanka is expected to have one of the fastest-growing territorial enrolments globally. The British Council estimates that by 2027, there would be 32,000 international students from Sri Lanka, an increase of roughly 80% over current UNESCO standards (ICEF, 2018).

UNIVERSAL PROPENSITIES OF INTERNATIONAL STUDENT MOBILITY

Worldwide, the population of international students enrolled in higher education has grown significantly over the past few decades, reaching 2 million in 2000 to 5.3 million in 2017, with Australia, the US, France, the UK, Russia, and Germany being the most popular locations. (Migration Data Portal, 2020). In 2018, there were 5.6 million international students worldwide. Half of these students are from Asia and the Pacific. The United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia continue to be the main hosts of international students in English-speaking countries. Non-English-speaking countries with a large number of international students include Germany, Russia, and France (T.I.M.E, 2021) In terms of outgoing mobility, China, India, Vietnam, South Korea, Germany, and France are the top sending countries. Indian and Chinese students continue to make up the majority of those seeking a degree overseas. External migration increased in other Asian nations such as Nepal (+27%) and Vietnam (+15%) between 2017 and 2018. According to the OECD, there will be 8 million internationally mobile students by 2025 (OECD, 2017).

The most recent cycles of ICEF's Agent Voice survey series collected education agents' perspectives on issues such as day-to-day agency operations, recruitment estimates, destination desirability, student decision considerations, and other market trends between January and May 2022 indicates that Students' desire to study abroad has increased by 73% in 2022 compared to 2021 (ICEF, 2022)

Educations.com conducted a study abroad survey with responses from more than 10,000 prospective students in 181 countries, and the results revealed the most startling global trends affecting the international student market. While the US maintains its consistent enrollment of 14 % in 2021 and 2020, the UK's appeal as a study abroad destination continues to decline each year. The biggest advances in the top three for 2021 came from Canada. In this region of North America, student interest increased by 10% in 2020 and by 14% increase in 2019. Australia has been the country that has struggled the most in 2021, in part because long-lasting pandemic barriers have only lately allowed overseas students access to its borders. Given that the preponderance of international students in Australia comes from this continent, it is surprising that interest among Asian students has dropped by 35% since 2019. Asian students have grown significantly more well-liked in Japan, with a 71 percent increase since 2019, along with an increase in interest in studying there (Svanholm, 2021).

Since many prospective international students are considering the possibility to live abroad for the first time, it's important to have a multifaceted awareness of their issues, which include concerns about safety. Only 15% of all prospective students reported having no concerns about safety while traveling abroad in 2021, leaving 85% of respondents with serious fears around the world. These figures are disproportionately high in Asia and Africa. In Africa, 91% say they worry about their safety while considering studying abroad, with racial prejudice being the top worry for 60% of those respondents. In Asia, the percentages of nervous students are significantly greater. Asian students in this group are anxious about safety in 93%, probable racial discrimination in 26%, and Asian hatred in 25% abroad. Finding job security in the midst of economic instability has become more important than ever as the epidemic continues to influence the choices made by overseas students. In 2021, compared to 2020 70% more European students place graduate employment prospects as one of the most crucial program considerations. Certain parts of Asia are also considering their future job paths. Since 2020, the percentage of students in Southeast and South Asia who place the highest value on graduate career prospects has increased by 26%. Mental health is related to the increased anxiety about future jobs and safety concerns. The mental health of overseas students is receiving more attention, particularly as society continues to acclimate to emerging world realities. The proportion of students who feel that a university's mental health support services are very important has increased by 14% since 2020. Considering the top social media platforms, in 2021, Instagram takes the top rank as the social media site that is the most useful for finding out information about a university. Facebook still outperforms Instagram in Africa with 31% of students, despite the fact that it is now just the favored platform for 10% of students in North America (Svanholm, 2021).

One thing is certain: when asked about their preferred class method, students generally indicated that they were not interested in studying abroad entirely online. More unexpectedly, 43% favor blended learning, which is a combination of online and traditional classroom instruction. According to the survey, American students (42 %) place twice as much value on a course's flexibility and study methods as do Canadian students (2%) Additionally, the survey discovered that South Asians now consider on-campus delivery to be nearly four times more important than it was the previous year when making decisions about study abroad programs (24%). Peer-to-peer communication's importance is difficult to understate. Prior to submitting an application to a university in 2021, 63% of prospective students stated that they would like to speak with international students there. These figures highlight the significance of student ambassadors who are presently studying abroad, while only 17% want to speak to a program or university's alumni. When choosing where to study, prospective students referenced student testimonials on their experiences studying abroad 39% of the time in a survey from 2021. In Oceania (56%), North America (52%), and Europe, student stories have even more of an impact than the average global story (47%) (Svanholm, 2021).

As soon as the pandemic hit the world, over half of students in Oceania and Africa worry about getting a visa to enter the nation of their choosing (59%). African students have the most percentage of students nervous about teaching flexibility (13%) and the recognition of online qualifications (13%), while Oceanic students are the most concerned about staying motivated and engaged for their studies (35%). Asian students are particularly concerned about time discrepancies in online programs (18%) and the recognition of their online qualifications (12%). In North America (48%) and Latin America, only around half of the prospective students are concerned about the lack of cultural possibilities (47%). However, when considering studying abroad, Europeans are the group most worried (42%) about their social life and relationships with peers (Svanholm, 2021).

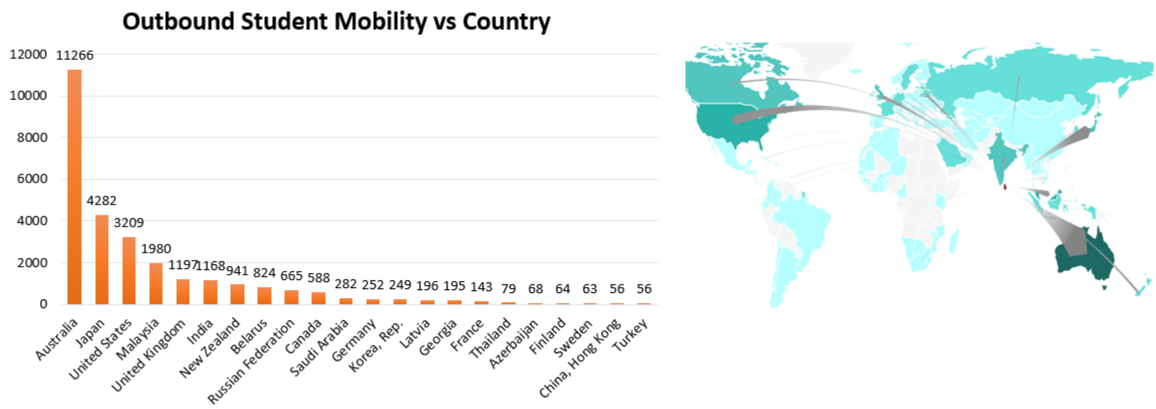
LOCAL STUDENT MOBILITY TRENDS

Sri Lankans frequently travel abroad for academic purposes to the Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and other countries to gain work visas, permanent residency permits, and citizenship. Because university admissions in Sri Lanka are tough, many students look for possibilities to study in other countries (Weeraratne, Weerasekera & Bandara, 2022) In Sri Lanka, there are only 15 state institutions that are directly administered by the University Grants Commission, which oversees funding and appointments. The University of Colombo, University of Moratuwa, University of Kelaniya, University of Peradeniya, University of Sri Jayewardenepura, and the University of Ruhuna are among the most prominent. Undergraduate education in state universities is free but extremely competitive, limited, and standardized, In the year 2018 / 2019, a total of 181,000 students got qualified to apply for a state university, out of 267,202 students who sat for GCE AL exams, however only 30,000 students were admitted due to limited state university quota system (17%) (Daily Mirror, 2020).

In the year 2016/2017 a total of 263,184 sat for the GCE AL exam and only 160,517 got qualified where 71,106 applied for state university and only 29,696 got selected, 120,000 abandon their ambition to enter a university. Out of the 350,000 students that take the university admission (A-level) exams each year, only about 25,000 to 30,000 have been admitted annually due to the constrained capacity of the country's universities. Every year, between 22,000 and 30,000 Sri Lankan students study overseas., with an estimated US$400 million in foreign exchange drained from the country (University Guide, 2021). In 2020, 277,625 students took the GCE Advanced Level exams, with 62% of them being qualified for state university admission. However, due to limited admissions, only 23% of qualifying applicants were accepted to one of Sri Lanka's 15 universities (CBSL, 2020).

Aside from capacity constraints, the public university system has a number of challenges, including regular protests and admissions bottlenecks, which cause students to enter at an older age and graduate later. As a result, university graduates will be older on average than international graduates. Furthermore, because of the country's high youth unemployment rate (20.9 %), there is a growing trend among the country's educated and highly qualified workforce to seek greener pastures abroad (Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, 2008). Investigating these global opportunities can be done through student mobility. Furthermore, there is a tendency to pursue further education to avoid being labeled as unemployed if finding immediate employment is difficult.

Figure 1 – Demonstrate Outbound Student Mobility from Sri Lanka



Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics, April 2021

Figure 1 indicates the outbound student mobility from Sri Lanka to other countries, Australia stands at the top, with the second large number for Japan, followed by the USA, Malaysia, and UK.

COVID 19 AND STUDENT MOBILITY

Individuals interested in international education have faced huge challenges because of the recent COVID-19 pandemic. The Overseas Organization for Migration (IOM) reports that the epidemic's migration restrictions have caused international students and universities to reassess their educational goals. For example, US authorities attempted to impose a deportation strategy on overseas students enrolled in e-learning programs only; New Zealand shut its border to overseas students, while a pilot program for online enrolled students was established by Australia (International Organization for Migration, 2021). The IOM (2021) goes on to say that the pandemic's immediate and policy impacts may leave overseas students "disproportionately destitute." For example, a survey of overseas students in Australia discovered that severe accommodation insecurity existed prior to the epidemic. According to the same poll, nearly 33% of students claimed they would forego some meals in 2020 to cover housing costs (Weeraratne, Weerasekera & Bandara, 2022) The outbreak of COVID-19 has an economic and institutional effect on the host countries. The three main recipients, Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, are estimated to lose billions of dollars if 80,000 fewer Chinese students enter the United States, 35,000 fewer in the United Kingdom, and roughly 30,000 fewer in Australia. China is currently the leading sender of students (928,00). The total number of international students studying in the United States decreased by 15% from the previous academic year to 2020–21, reports the United States Institute of International Education (IIE). In comparison to 2019, the overall number of international students in the US and Australia decreased by almost 5% in 2020. In 2020, the drop for newly enrolled students was 23%. (Kercher, 2021). Higher education is no exception since most global industries have experienced considerable changes to adapt to pandemic settings. For instance, a lot of courses are now delivered digitally, enabling students to learn from the convenience of their homes. Universities have therefore swiftly reacted and adjusted to the new normal conditions, from dismantling higher education institutions to promoting online learning and providing support for separated students and faculty (Waters, 2021). The closure of international borders, as well as the epidemic in general, have had an impact on Sri Lankan students who contemplated student mobility for their higher education. A few students had to postpone their studies, and others had to abandon their plans.

SRI LANKA ECONOMIC CRISIS AND STUDENT MOBILITY

Sri Lanka's economy is in disarray. Inflation is skyrocketing, with food costs rising by a whopping 30% in March alone. The rupee has plummeted in value against the US dollar, and access to foreign currency is so limited that Sri Lanka is now unable to pay for vital imports, such as fuel, resulting in frequent power outages. The crisis's ramifications are far-reaching, and they are now beginning to affect Sri Lankan students studying overseas (ICEF,2022). The ongoing Sri Lankan economic crisis is making it difficult for international students from the country to keep up with the expenditures of studying abroad (Mohamed, 2022) With domestic costs rising and foreign currency limitations in place – not to mention that obtaining foreign cash is now much more expensive – more Sri Lankan students are struggling to pay fees for their continued education overseas. Students in the United Kingdom who are unable to pay their university tuition have turned to Facebook groups to trade money (Packer,2022) Some potential international students in Sri Lanka who have received offers from foreign universities have been unable to pay the appropriate registration costs (Packer, 2022) it was further added by Packer that the current crisis is seeing student inquiries increase as families want their children to have options outside of Sri Lanka. Alongside there are limited dollar reserves in the country which is preventing from new students enrolling in foreign universities and due to the prevailing political and economic instability, many students are placed in waiting to get their visa decisions from Australian and Canadian immigration. It is unclear how the current crisis will affect outbound mobility in the medium- to long-term. However, Sri Lanka has been widely identified as a significant South Asian growth market for student recruitment. The number of Sri Lankan students studying abroad has nearly doubled in the five years preceding the pandemic, with more than 30,000 students studying abroad in 2019 (ICEF, 2022).

PUSH AND PULL FACTORS

Global patterns of international student mobility flows can be explained by a mix of "Push and Pull" characteristics that motivate students to study abroad. A student's decision to pursue foreign education is influenced by "push" forces present in the place of origin. To recruit international students, the "pull" phenomenon operates within a host country. Some of these qualities are inherited from the originating country, while others are inherited from the host country and the students (Mazzarol & Soutar 2002). Many Asian countries' lack of access to higher education has been a major motivator of student mobility. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), Some push factors demonstrate that many students think studying abroad is preferable to studying locally. Second, it can be challenging for students to enroll in a course in their native country because of a lack of space or the unavailability of the program. Parental influence is especially significant among undergraduate students in South Asia. According to Mazzarol and Soutar (2002), the geographical proximity of the source to the host country may also have an effect. Some of the draw reasons were the reputation or profile of the country and university, word of mouth, quality of education, scholarships, international partnerships, internship programmes, program recognition, and migration options after studies.

From a Sri Lankan perspective, the following are some of the push and pull forces found by Weeraratne, Weerasekera, and Bandara (2022) through a local student sample. Despite being admitted into Sri Lanka's public higher education system, approximately half of the respondents chose to further their education in another country. This implies that, even though the latter is free, studying abroad is superior to completing higher education in the local university system. Moving overseas is the sole option for students who desire to study at top-ranked and notable colleges because local institutions are not considered as highly ranked higher education providers. As a result, university rankings were considered. Nevertheless, personality attributes, the desire to travel abroad, the desire to immigrate permanently and use student mobility as a stepping stone to citizenship, and other factors are all crucial factors (Boneva & Frieze, 2001). Universities with large international student populations broaden their students' perspectives and connections. Alumni networks serve to support this even further. Finally, motivational factors such as living abroad or independently as well as exposure to various cultures and communities were suggested. As a result, these characteristics can be exploited to promote student mobility (Weeraratne, Weerasekera & Bandara, 2022).

STUDENT MOBILITY PATTERNS FROM SRI LANKA TO DESTINATION COUNTRY

According to Weeraratne, Weerasekera, and Bandara's (2022) research, the destinations are chosen based on the regional patterns and the leading host nations. Furthermore, rather than a single collected source, data is sourced from several countries' immigration/home affairs offices. According to the primary data sample, in 2020 the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom were the top three destinations for Sri Lankan undergraduate migrants, accounting for more than half of the sample. Many students traveled to India, Latvia, and Canada, while fewer went to China and Malaysia. As a result, the primary trend is to relocate to OECD nations. Sri Lankan students frequently migrate to Australia. Sri Lankans have received visas ranging from 476-26,928 in the last 15 years. While the number of student visas issued progressively climbed between 2005 and 2009, yet another increase is shown in 2010, suggesting the maximum number of student visas issued between 2005 and 2020.

The number of student visas granted annually to Sri Lankan students for the United States, another popular study abroad destination, has ranged from 600 to 1,200 during the past 20 years. The

United States issued the fewest visas to Sri Lanka between 2000 and 2019. According to Israel and Batalova (2021), In 2019–20, around 1.1 million international students attended US universities, a drop of almost 20,000 from the previous year. According to Israel and Batalova (2021), Major factors in this fall were the rising expense of higher education in the United States, an increase in the number of student visa delays and refusals, a harsh political climate for immigrants under President Trump's term, and more chances to study abroad (Israel & Batalova, 2021). Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic has spread significantly.

Sri Lankans are increasingly choosing Canada as a study abroad option. Sri Lankans, where the number of visa holders has risen from 290 in 2015 to approximately 1,000 in 2019. This is largely because of Canada's need for skilled employees, which led to the extension of immigration channels to influential workers and international students studying there (Government of Canada, 2018). COVID- The 19 decline is expected to have an impact in 2020. New Zealand, as a student migration host country, may follow a similar path. The number of student visa permits issued is likewise increasing, with less than 300 authorized in 2009/2010 growing to nearly 800 by 2019/2020. Furthermore, an average of 1,000 student migrants studied in Japan between 2004 and 2014; this increased to 4,000 in 2016 and is predicted to more than double to 8,000 students by 2018. In 2017, there were around 6,610 Sri Lankan students studying in Japan, a 67 percent increase from the previous year. The research attributes the growth in enrollment in Japan to a number of causes, including Japanese government support for subsidized industry internships, assistance with job placement after graduation, extra Japanese language training, and more simplified work processes. Finally, India is becoming more popular among overseas students, particularly those from South Asia, which includes Sri Lanka.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion by reviewing the previous studies and the literature concerning global student mobility and specifically student mobility trends in Sri Lanka. According to UNESCO estimates, which mostly include students traveling abroad for higher education, the number of outbound students has nearly doubled in the last decade, with approximately 18,000 Sri Lankans studying abroad in 2016. Many industry experts, however, consider Sri Lanka to be one of the region's fastest-growing emerging economies. As previously said, the country has very strong foundations that will continue to increase demand for international studies, such as a large and expanding college-aged population and robust economic growth. The country's tertiary-level student population is very mobile, in part because higher education in Sri Lanka cannot keep up with demand, especially at the undergraduate level. Many Sri Lankan youth reportedly regard migration or abroad education as ways to better their employment chances. Sri Lanka's government encourages students to pursue higher education overseas. The Ministry of Higher Education finances outward mobility at the undergraduate and graduate levels through study abroad scholarships that are country- and program-specific (D'Souza, 2017) It can be concluded that there are a massive growth and opportunities for Sri Lanka and Sri Lankan students to explore their study opportunities abroad.

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