



Sri Lankan Students' Perceptions and the Factors that Affect Migrating for Their Higher Studies

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ABSTRACT

In recent times, with globalization, especially in Asian countries, there has been an increasing trend of student migration for higher education. This can cause short-term and long-term brain drain and the overflow of foreign exchange out of the country. Therefore, this study intends to provide students' perceptions and the factors that affect migrating for their higher studies in Sri Lanka. This study is based on primary data from a rapid online survey of Sri Lankan students who are aged between 16 and 30 years old. Among 110 respondents, there were 51% males and 49% females. More than 60% of students were aged between 21-22 years old. Among all students, 83.6% of students are hoping to go abroad for higher studies. The students cited reasons such as the high quality of education abroad (56.4%), economic instability in Sri Lanka (53.6%), and limited enrolment and resources in government universities (20%) for choosing to study overseas. Students prefer studying abroad due to dissatisfaction with the local higher education system. Government school and state university graduates tend to migrate for higher education and not return home.

1. INTRODUCTION

Migration for educational purposes has become a vast and growing outflow from Sri Lanka. Based on available secondary data, there has been an increase in student migration from Sri Lanka in the 2013–2017 period (UNESCO, 2020). Weeraratne et al. (2022) provided an initial scope and understanding of Sri Lankan-origin students migrating for higher studies. The study has highlighted push and pull factors which imply that studying abroad is considered more desirable than pursuing tertiary education in the local university system due to factors such as higher quality, speed of obtaining educational qualifications, and the prestige associated with universities abroad, the desire for an experience in another country and the desire to migrate permanently. However, Weeraratne et al. (2022) conducted a study on those who have already enrolled in an educational program abroad. Therefore, this study proposed to identify students' perceptions and the factors that affect migrating for their higher studies. Findings from this research will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on perceptions and the factors of student migration, specifically focusing on the Sri Lankan context. The results will inform policy-makers, educational institutions, and stakeholders in developing targeted interventions and strategies that support students' educational aspirations, promote retention, and foster the country's development through a skilled and knowledgeable workforce.

On view of the above, this study aims to clarify the variables influencing students' decision-making by studying their perspectives.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study utilized a self-administered questionnaire of multiple-choice items which had been designed digitally using Google Forms by Google. The sample size was 110. Participants for this study were high school students, undergraduates, and postgraduate students. Participation in this study

was not compensated financially or by any other incentives. This survey-based study was carried out from 27 June 2023 to 3 July 2023.

The questionnaire had three main categories (1) demographic data including gender, age, and ethnicity, (2) socioeconomic factors including monthly income, living home town, type of school attended or attending, highest level of schooling completed, and Which stream they study or studying and (3) students' perceptions and preferences about migration for higher education including where would they prefer to do their higher studies, the field of higher studies and the expected qualification to receive abroad. The reasons for going abroad and whether the students are willing to come back to Sri Lanka after completing their higher studies were also recorded. Finally, students' suggestions on how to improve the sector of higher studies in Sri Lanka were asked. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze data using R studio.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1. BASIC INFORMATION

The preliminary analysis was conducted on demographic data. Out of 110 students, females were 49% and males were 51%. The distribution of age and family monthly income are shown in Table 1. Irrespective of gender, the mean age was 22 years old, and it ranges between 16 and 30 years old with a median of 22 years. The mean family income was Rs. 133,150/=.

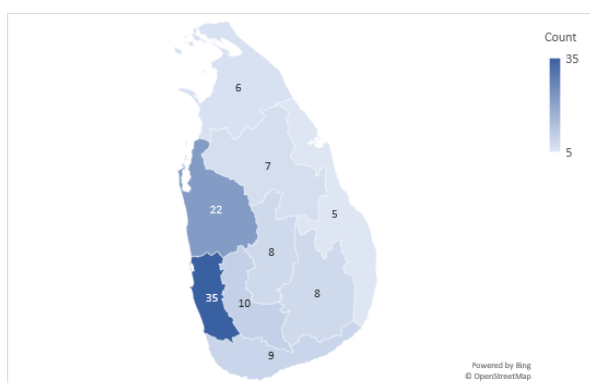
Table 1. Age and Family income of students

Age	Percentage
16-18 years	4%
19-20 years	8%
21- 22 years	56%
23 - 24 years	26%
25-30 years	6%

Family monthly income	Percentage
Less than Rs 50,000	17%
Rs 51,000 - Rs 100,000	34%
Rs 101,000 - Rs 150,000	19%
Rs 151,000 - Rs 200,000	10%
Rs 201,000 - Rs 250,000	8%
More than Rs 251,000	12%

3.2. DISTRIBUTION OF STUDENTS

Figure1 Student density in each province



The survey results are represented in Figure 1, which shows the density of students in each province. The responses received from each province are as follows: Western Province (31.8%), Northwestern Province (20.0%), Sabaragamuwa Province (9.1%), Southern Province (8.2%), Uva Province (7.3%), Central Province (7.3%), North Central Province (6.4%), Northern Province (5.5%), and Eastern Province (4.5%). 80% of the students have attended or are attending government schools, which is the highest number among all types of schools. Among those who have completed their highest level of education, 54% are currently enrolled in state universities. However, 31% prefer to go abroad for their higher education, while 28% prefer private universities.

Table 2. Student's idea about going abroad and coming back

Are you hoping to go abroad for higher studies?	Percentage
Yes	84%

Are you willing to come back to Sri Lanka?	Percentage
No	16%
Yes	37%
No	26%
Not sure	37%

Out of all the students, 84% are hoping to go abroad for higher studies. However, 26% of students are not willing to do so, and 37% of students are not sure about coming back to Sri Lanka after completing their higher education. Table 4 highlights the expected qualifications to earn abroad. According to the data, 32.70% of students are expected to earn a Bachelor's (First) Degree, while the majority, 37.30%, are expected to pursue a Master's (Postgraduate) Degree overseas.

What is the type of your institute?	Percentage
State University	54%
Private University	38%
Not Relevant	8%

Table 3. Type of the institute students currently attending

What is the expected qualification to receive abroad?	Percentage
Diploma	6.40%
Batchelor's (First) Degree	32.70%
Masters (Postgraduate) Degree	37.30%
PhD	17.30%
MBBS (Bachelor of medicine and surgery)	0.90%
Other	5.50%

The reasons to go abroad for your higher studies.	Percentage
Quality of higher Education	56.0%
Economic instability in Sri Lanka	53.6%
Interest on travel around the world	42.7%
Political instability in Sri Lanka	39.1%
Less opportunity to get proper trainings	28.2%

Limited enrollments and resources in the government universities	20.0%
Siblings or relatives live abroad	16.4%
other	2.0%

According to Table 4, the factors impacting the education system in Sri Lanka include the quality of higher education, political and economic instability in the country, limited enrolment and resources in government universities, lack of access to proper training in Sri Lanka, the presence of siblings or relatives living abroad, and a general interest in international travel.

According to this research, 56% of students believe that the main reason for seeking higher education overseas is the lack of quality education and faculty in local universities, which are not on par with globally ranked institutions. 39% of students claimed the unstable economic and political environment. However, the following factors should be considered as opportunities to improve the education system: providing proper training, increasing the number of students selected for state universities, restructuring the education system, and reducing the time required to graduate.

4. CONCLUSIONS

There are several reasons why students from government schools and universities are increasingly pursuing higher education abroad. These include the belief that foreign universities offer better quality education, the faster attainment of educational qualifications, and the prestige associated with studying overseas. Furthermore, students often desire the opportunity to live and study in another country, with some even seeking permanent migration options through student migration programs. Regrettably, some students who receive free education are reluctant to return to their home country after completing their studies abroad, which presents a difficult situation for the economy and labour market as skilled workers leave the country.

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