

Educational Migration from Kerala: An Empirical Study of Student Mobility for Higher Education

Jeena P.M., Afnitha P

Assistant Professor, Dept. of PG Studies & Research in Economics, MES Ponnani College, Ponnani,
Malappuram, Kerala, India

Post Graduate Student, Dept. of PG Studies & Research in Economics, MES Ponnani College, Ponnani,
Malappuram, Kerala, India

DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.915EC00730>

Received: 02 August 2025; Accepted: 08 August 2025; Published: 06 September 2025

ABSTRACT

Migration has become a defining feature of the globalized world, with educational migration emerging as a significant trend, particularly among students seeking higher education opportunities abroad. This study explores the phenomenon of educational migration from Kerala, India, to countries such as the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. It examines the underlying push and pull factors influencing students' decisions, including limited opportunities in domestic institutions, the desire for global exposure, advanced academic infrastructure, and better career prospects abroad. The choice of destination countries is justified by their globally recognized education systems and favorable immigration policies. The UK is preferred due to abundant scholarships, affordable living costs, and flexible part-time job options. Australia and Canada are chosen for their easier immigration pathways and employment opportunities. While the US offers high-quality education and well-paid jobs post-graduation, its higher living costs and work restrictions make it a slightly less favorable option. The study also investigates the academic and economic impacts of such migration and to investigate the reasons behind students migrating from Kerala to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia. It is based on primary data collected from 130 students who migrated for higher education, using structured questionnaire and surveys. Statistical tools such as Chi-square test and trend analysis were employed to examine patterns and influencing factors. The findings indicate that despite Kerala's strong educational foundation, students often migrate due to outdated curricula, intense competition, and a lack of job-oriented courses, while attractive immigration policies, scholarships, and global career opportunities serve as major pull factors. The study further identifies key challenges faced by students, including cultural adaptation, financial strain, and legal complexities. It highlights the benefits of international education, such as academic recognition, skill development, and personal growth, while also acknowledging concerns such as brain drain and economic dependency on remittances. The research underscores the need for policy reforms in Kerala's education system to retain talent and better prepare students for global academic and professional environments.

Keywords: Educational Migration, Higher Education, Push and Pull Factors, Overseas Education, Brain drain.

INTRODUCTION

Migration is a global phenomenon involving the movement of people from their usual residence to new locations, either within a country (internal migration) or across borders (international migration). The UN defines long-term migrants as individuals residing outside their country of origin for at least 12 months. As of 2024, there are approximately 281 million international migrants, accounting for 3.5% of the global population. Migration is influenced by push factors (e.g., poverty, conflict, unemployment) and pulls factors (e.g., better jobs, education, healthcare, and security). Educational migration, a major form of international migration, involves moving abroad for academic purposes. It has gained momentum due to globalisation, rising career aspirations, and the appeal of internationally recognised qualifications.

Countries like the US, UK, Canada, and Australia are top destinations because they offer globally recognized degrees, advanced academic infrastructure, diverse scholarships, and student-friendly immigration policies. They provide strong employment prospects, multicultural environments, and research opportunities, making them highly attractive for students seeking quality education and promising career growth abroad. Kerala, a state in India, has seen a surge in educational migration, driven by limited opportunities in Indian institutions, outdated curricula, and the desire for global exposure. The availability of scholarships, support networks abroad, and remittances from emigrant families further support this trend. However, students from Kerala face challenges abroad, including culture shock, language barriers, academic stress, financial strain, and visa complications. Despite these difficulties, educational migration offers academic, personal, and professional benefits, such as global recognition, skill development, and enhanced career prospects. Migration trends are shaped by economic, cultural, and policy factors. While educational migration can cause brain drain, reverse migration is also observed when students return with advanced skills. Understanding these dynamics is vital for students, educators, and policymakers to improve support systems and maximise the benefits of international education.

Objectives of the study

1. To investigate the reasons behind students migrating from Kerala to the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, and Australia.
2. To examine the academic and economic impact of migration.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Skariah and Sivarenjini (2024) investigate international student migration from Kerala, focusing on motivations, experiences, and trends, particularly post-pandemic. The study identifies key factors driving migration, including higher-quality education and better career prospects, aligning with the objective of understanding student mobility dynamics. Using a mixed-methods approach with 37 participants from Thiruvalla, Kerala, the research examines the nature and characteristics of migration, revealing a preference for English-speaking countries like the UK, New Zealand, and Germany. Trends indicate long-term migration goals, financial challenges, and cultural adaptation issues. The study underscores the need for educational reforms in Kerala to meet global standards and student aspirations.

Fejes et al. (2020) studied the “long summer migration” in 2015 and highlighted the role of adult education in supporting migrant inclusion. Research emphasises the prevailing migrants as lacking essential knowledge, particularly language and cultural competencies, necessary for societal inclusion (Fejes 2019; Simpson & Whiteside, 2015). However, this focus often neglects other inclusion factors and excludes migrants’ lived experiences (Rydell, 2018). Studies from Austria, Finland, Germany, Italy and Sweden highlight dialogue and valuing newcomers’ competencies as central to effective adult education. Theoretical frameworks include philosophical, psychological and post-colonial perspectives; employing qualitative methods like ethnography and action research, with growing state influence on employability-focused curricula.

Boichuk (2023) investigates educational migration to Poland, particularly the influx of Ukrainian students. By analysing statistical data from 2004, the important objective of the study is to determine the state of knowledge on educational emigration to Poland and the identification of trends concerning the scale, structure, and directions of educational emigration to Poland. The research highlights gaps in understanding student mobility, both in terms of demand and supply. Findings suggest that increasing foreign student numbers can positively impact the local labour market and demographic stability if they remain in the host country. The study emphasises the role of governments, businesses, and academic institutions in harnessing educational migration for economic and social benefits.

North, Chase (2023) analysed the relationship between migration, education, and development, which remains under-theorized despite growing research in related fields. The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) recognise education's role in sustainable development but give limited attention to migration’s impact, often confining it to international student mobility. This volume addresses these gaps by exploring education,

migration, and development from interdisciplinary perspectives, emphasising the dynamics of mobility and immobility (Schewel, 2020; Carling, 2002). It highlights how migration influences education policy, curricula, and pedagogy while also intersecting with inequalities such as gender. The work critiques mobility bias, examines both formal and informal education, and considers migration as both a driver and obstacle to development.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study is planned to examine student migration from Kerala to abroad for higher education and relies on primary data. The research used here is purely descriptive. Stratified and convenience sampling methods are used. Data is collected through structured questionnaire and survey method. The primary data is collected from 130 students who have migrated from Kerala to the UK, US, Australia, and Canada for pursuing higher education. The data collected is analysed with the help of descriptive statistics such as percentage, mean score and frequencies. Statistical analysis was employed to understand trends and patterns in educational migration. The Chi-square test and trend line are used as statistical tools in this study.

Data analysis and interpretation

The present study is an attempt to analyse the educational migration from Kerala to abroad for higher education. This study mainly selected four countries: the UK, the US, Canada, and Australia. Students migrate to these countries for educational purposes. This study mainly depends on primary data. Primary data has been collected from 130 students who have migrated to the UK, US, Canada, and Australia. The educational level of the students, the primary reason for choosing to study abroad, the reason for choosing a specific destination country, the financial factors of the students, the academic and economic impact of migration, the sources of funding for education abroad, part-time job earnings, details of educational loans, and their visa status are some indicators used to find out the migrated students.. The sample consist of 130 migrated students who settled at the UK, US, Canada, and Australia.

Table 1 Destination of students migrated

Name of the Country	Percentage
UK	29.2
USA	23.1
Canada	24.6
Australia	23.1
Total	100

Source: Primary data.

The destination of migrated students is shown in table 1 which presents the distribution of students from Kerala to pursue higher education in four major destination countries. The UK emerged as the most favoured destination for migration, chosen by 29.2% of respondents. Canada followed closely as the second preference. Both countries are strongly recommended due to their strong economies, cultural diversity, and opportunities in sectors like technology and education. USA and Australia are 23.1% in the data. USA remains a popular destination for international students, but several factors might lead some to consider other countries, including high tuition costs, the difficulty of securing visas and employment after graduation, and the rising cost of living.

Table 2 Current status of migration

Current status of migration.	Number of respondents.	Percentage.
Students.	28	21.5

Students with part-time job.	73	55.8
Employed.	29	22.7
Total	130	100

Source: Primary data.

The current status of migration is shown in table 2. The present engagement of 130 respondents who migrated from Kerala for higher education, it appears that a significant portion of migrated students have part-time employment in their respective countries. Only 21.5% of the sample respondents maintained the status of being solely students, indicating that a large majority are engaging in some form of work alongside their studies. Additionally, 22.7% of the respondents have completed their studies and transitioned into permanent employment. This suggests a trend where many students are leveraging their educational experiences abroad to secure long-term career opportunities, contributing to the workforce of their chosen migration destinations. This dual focus on education and employment reflects the practical considerations and career aspirations of international students seeking to build their futures in foreign countries.

Table 3 Reasons for migration

Reasons of migration (Observed frequency)	Female	Male	Total
Economic condition of family	2	2	4
Better income and carrier	18	36	54
Availability of scholarship	4	6	10
Shortage of employment opportunities	3	11	14
Political and social climate of the country	0	4	4
Better education opportunities	6	24	30
Improved standard of living	3	11	14
Total	36	94	130
	Expected frequency		
Reasons of migration	Female	Male	Total
Economic condition of family	1.10769	2.89231	4
Better income and carrier	14.9538	39.0462	54
Availability of scholarship	2.76923	7.23077	10
Shortage of employment opportunities	3.87692	10.1231	14
Political and social climate of the country	1.10769	2.89231	4
Better education opportunities	8.30769	21.6923	30
Improved standard of living	3.87692	10.1231	14
Total	36	94	130
			0.472341

Source: Primary data.

Statistical test: - Chi-square test for goodness of fit is used to explain the reasons of migration.

Critical value: 0.05

P-value: 0.472341

H0: - There is no significant difference in the distribution of reasons for choosing to study abroad.

H1: - There is a significant difference in the distribution of reasons for choosing to study abroad.

Since the P-value is extremely small ($P < 0.05$), we reject the null hypothesis (H0). This indicates that the distribution of reasons for studying abroad is not uniform. Some reasons are significantly different than others.

Thus it is clear from table3 that there are several reasons for migration, especially some compelling reasons driving students to migrate from Kerala. Predominantly, the aspiration for better income and career prospects is a significant motivating factor. Many students are also seeking superior educational opportunities available abroad, which they believe can enhance their skills and future job prospects. Additionally, a perceived lack of sufficient employment opportunities in India to meet their career expectations is another critical reason for migration. This combination of seeking enhanced education, better job prospects, and higher income potential illustrates the multifaceted motivations behind the decision of many Kerala students to pursue opportunities abroad.

Table 4 Socio-economic impact of migration

Elements	Yes	No
Were financial factors a major reason for Your decision to study abroad?	111	19
Have you faced any academic challenges while Studying abroad?	63	67
Would you recommend studying abroad to others?	117	13
Do the parents have any family members to provide support?	120	10
Did you take loan to cover the cost of migration?	97	33
Are you able to provide financial support for your family?	50	80
Do you plan to settle in your host country after completing your education?	125	5
Are there any restrictions on sending money to your home country?	62	68

Source: Primary data

Table 4 represents socio-economic impact of migration. The socio-economic analysis of migration among students highlights a range of challenges and impacts on both the migrants and their families. While many migrant students are able to send savings back home, not all can afford to do so, understanding varying levels of financial capacity among migrants. The expensive process of migration itself often places significant financial strain on families, contributing to overall financial difficulties. Moreover, parents of migrated students face social isolation and support challenges back home, as their children are often their primary source of support.

Table 5 Money earned from part-time job

Money (observed frequency)	PG	Medical Field	UG	Ph.D	Engineering	Total
30000-50000	7	1	4		4	16
50000-1 lakh	10	2	4		1	17
1 lakh- 2 lakh	20	7	5	2	1	35
Morethan 2lakh	20	27	1	9	4	61
Total	57	37	14	11	10	129
Expected frequency	PG	Medical Field	UG	Phd	Engineering	Total

30000-50000	7.069767	4.589147287	1.736434109	1.364341	1.240310078	16
50000-1 lakh	7.511628	4.875968992	1.84496124	1.449612	1.317829457	17
1 lakh- 2 lakh	15.46512	10.03875969	3.798449612	2.984496	2.713178295	35
Morethan 2lakh	26.95349	17.49612403	6.620155039	5.20155	4.728682171	61
Total	57	37	14	11	10	129
			Critical Value=	0.05	P-Value=	0.000367

Source: Primary data.

Statistical test: - Chi-square goodness of fit is used to understand the money earned from part- time job.

H0:- The proportion of people earning in each income category from part-time jobs is equal.

H1:- The proportion of people earning in each income category from part-time jobs is not equal.

Table 5 indicates that migrated students earned income from part-time job. Since the P-value is less than the critical value of 0.05. So we reject the null hypothesis (H0), and accept the alternative hypothesis (H1). The analysis presents money earned from part-time jobs across different educational backgrounds: postgraduates, medical field, undergraduate, PhD holders, and engineering students. The observed frequencies indicate that the majority of respondents, particularly those from the medical field and PG categories, earn more than 2 lakh from part-time work.

Table 6 Educational Loan

Loan amount	Canada	Australia	UK	USA	Total
10-20 lakh	13	12	22	6	53
20-30 lakh	10	7	2	7	26
more than 30 lakh	1	5	3	9	18
Total	24	24	27	22	97
Expected frequency	Canada	Australia	UK	USA	Total
10-20 lakh	13.1134	13.11340206	14.75258	12.02062	53
20-30 lakh	6.43299	6.432989691	7.237113	5.896907	26
more than 30 lakh	4.453608	4.453608247	5.010309	4.082474	18
Total	24	24	27	22	97
		Critical-value=	0.05	P-Value=	0.001128

Source: Primary data.

Statistical test: - Chi-square goodness of fit is used to study the amount of educational loan taken for the purpose of studying abroad.

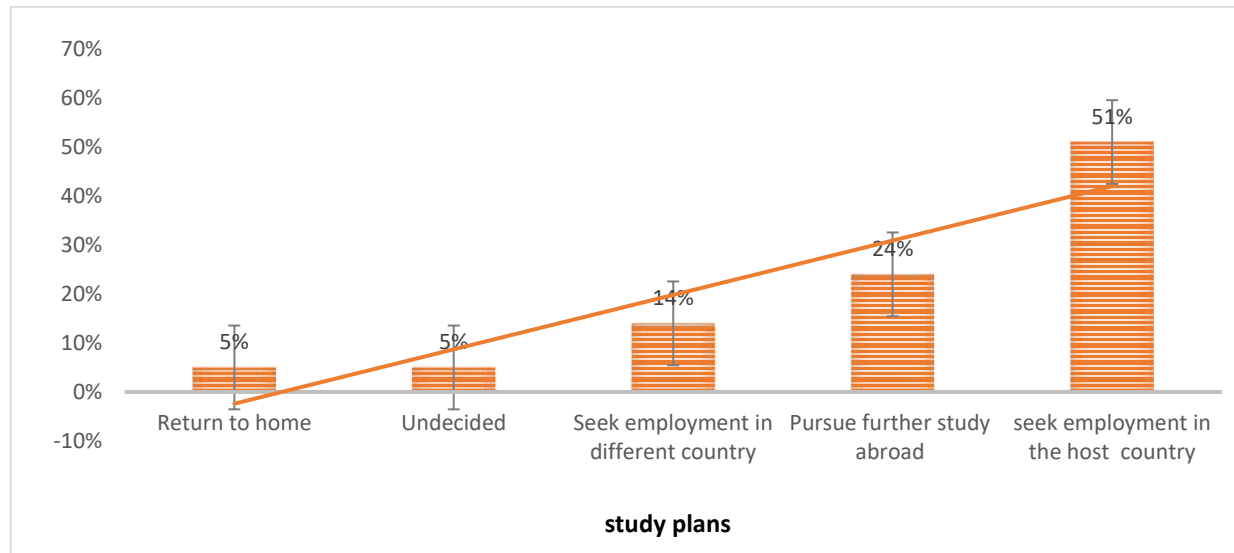
H0:- There is no association between the country and the educational loan amount.

H1:- There is an association between the country and the educational loan amount.

Table 6 presents educational loan taken by migrated students for the purpose of higher education abroad. Since the P-value is less than the critical value, we reject the null hypothesis, indicating a statistically significant

relationship between country and educational loan amount. The table shows the distribution of educational loan amounts across four countries: Canada, Australia, the UK, and the USA. The observed frequencies are compared with the expected frequencies calculated under the assumption that the loan amount is independent of the country.

Figure 1 Post study plans



Source: - Primary data.

Statistical test: - Trend line is used to study the post study plans.

Figure1 shows study plans which illustrate the post-study intentions of migrated students based on the primary data. The majority of students, 51%, plan to seek employment in the host country after completing their studies, indicating a strong preference to remain abroad. A smaller portion, 24%, wish to pursue further studies in another country, while 14% intend to seek employment in a different country altogether. Only 5% of the respondents plan to return to their home country, and another 5% remain undecided about their future plans.

CONCLUSION

The phenomenon of educational migration from Kerala to foreign countries is driven by a combination of academic aspirations, better employment opportunities, and the desire for global exposure. The study reveals that the majority of students migrate to countries like the UK, Canada, the USA, and Australia, primarily for postgraduate and professional education. While these students face several challenges, such as financial strain, cultural adjustment, and academic pressure. They also gain valuable experiences that contribute to their personal and professional growth. significant number of students engage in part-time jobs to support themselves, and many plan to settle abroad, indicating a long-term vision beyond just education. The findings highlight the need for systemic improvements in Kerala's higher education system, including curriculum reforms, job-orientated programmes, and enhanced career support. If addressed, these could reduce the dependency on foreign education and help retain talent within the state. Educational migration from Kerala to foreign countries for higher education has emerged as a significant trend over the past few decades. This movement is driven by students' aspirations for better academic opportunities, global exposure, and enhanced career prospects. The experience of studying abroad not only benefits individuals through personal and professional growth but can also contribute to the state's development when these students return with advanced skills and international perspectives.

REFERENCES

1. Amy North and Elaine Chase (2023): "Education, Migration and Development", Bloomsbury Publishing, First Published in Great Britain 2023.

2. Anila Skariah and B. Sivarenjini (2024): "Dynamics of International Student Migration: An Explorative Study in the Context of Kerala, India", AIDASCO Reviews, Page No.57-67.
3. Nataliia Boichuk N (2023): "Educational Migration Trends Review in Poland (With Particular Emphasis on the Immigration of Ukrainian Youth)", Studia Migracyjne-Przegląd Polonijny, Vol 1(187), Page No.141-162.
4. Ann H. Kim & Gunjan Sondhi (2015): "Bridging the literature on education migration", Population Change and Lifecourse Strategic Knowledge Cluster Discussion Paper Series/ Un Réseau Stratégique de Connaissances Changements de population et parcours de vie Document de travail, Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 7.
5. Anila Skariah and B. Sivarenjini (2024): "Dynamics of International Student Migration: An Explorative Study in the Context of Kerala, India", AIDASCO Reviews, Page No.57-67.
6. Aude Bernad & Martin Bell (2018): "Educational selectivity of internal migrants: A global assessment", Demographic Research, Vol 39, Article 29, Page No. 835- 854.
7. Brendan Cantwell (2024): "International postdocs: Educational migration and academic production in a global market", Published by The University of Arizona.
8. Nataliia Boichuk N (2023): "Educational Migration Trends Review in Poland (With Particular Emphasis on the Immigration of Ukrainian Youth)", Studia MigracyjnePrzegląd Polonijny, Vol 1(187), Page No.141-162.
9. Christian Dustmann and Albrecht Glitz (2011): "Migration and education", Handbook of the Economics of Education, Vol. 4, Discussion Paper No. 2011-11.
10. Diana Rokita-Poskart (2017): "Educational migration and its impact on the development of academic centres", Opole University of Technology.
11. Emek Basker (2018): "Education, Job Search, and Migration", Journal of Regional Analysis and Policy, Vol 48(4), Page No.38-61.
12. Esther Mirjam Girsberger (2017): "Migration, Education and Work Opportunities" University of Lausanne and IZA, IZA DP NO. 11028.
13. Fejes, Schreiber-Barsch & Wildemeersch (2020): "Adult Education and Migration: a relational matter", European Journal for Research on the Education and Learning of Adults, Vol.11, No.3, Page No.269-273
14. Nataliia Boichuk N (2023): "Educational Migration Trends Review in Poland (With Particular Emphasis on the Immigration of Ukrainian Youth)", Studia MigracyjnePrzegląd Polonijny, Vol 1(187), Page No.141-162.