The Effect of Demographic Factors on Determinants of Students' Destination Choice for Higher Education in Foreign Institutions

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Abstract

Present research is aimed at identifying the effect of demographic factors on determinants of students' destination choice for higher education in foreign institutions. Six major factors were extracted by factor analysis in the previous study. These factors are Personal Growth (PG), Role of Marketing & Communications(RMC), Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution(RHCFI), and Family & Friends(FF). In addition to it there are two factors which can act as barriers that hinder students in getting higher education in foreign institutions. These factors are Score & grade requirements(SGR) and Cost & Visa Issues(CVI). This research paper used these determinants and effect of socio demographic factors i.e., Gender and Region on these determinants is studied. The statistical tools like t-test, ANOVA and DMRT is used to meet the above objective. At the end, the effect of demographic factors on these determinants is presented.

Keywords: Destination Choice, Higher Education, International Students, Study abroad decision, socio demographic factors.

INTRODUCTION

Education now has been recognized as money making industry in many parts of the world. Globalization has made education a product and student a consumer. The student becomes the essential component in determining of quality of higher education. Therefore, use of marketing in HE is becoming a matter of thoughtful discussion.

According to UNESCO, "Higher education consists of all types of studies, training or training for research at the post-secondary level, provided by universities or other educational institutions of higher education by a capable state authority".

In the late 90s, economic, political and social changes all over the world were posing major challenges to higher education. The need was felt by the decision makers and practitioners of higher education to reform and change for a new paradigm in higher education. In 1998, the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE) was convened by UNESCO to bring out major changes at all the levels in all the countries. The major focus was to solve the quantity/quality dilemma and to meet the requirements of increasing responsibility of higher education in the knowledge-based society. Many countries modified their national policy frameworks with special adjustments in their systems with reference to admission policies, curriculum content, course delivery, teaching learning methods, policies and strategies etc. They adopted an entrepreneurial approach to get resources and establish links with working world. To meet the societal needs, new partnerships and syndicates of institutions were established. WCHE paves away the way for globalization of economies, trade, services, labour including

education and communication. It also helped in shaping the new relation between higher education, the State, the market and stakeholders for better management of higher educational institutions.

Globalization has opened up new opportunities in the area of higher education. The increased discussions on GATS (General Agreement on Trade in Services) by WTO have highlighted the importance of globalization of services in general and higher education in particular (Varghese, 2020). It results in fast growing commercialization in the higher education sector. It further intensifies the role of markets in the higher education sector. The growth of the population, especially the young population, has aggravated the pressure for admission which is also a contributing factor for increase in role of private sector.

After treating higher education as a tradable service and students as main consumers, it is becoming important to satisfy students because satisfied students' word of mouth publicity can help institutions to attract more students at lower marketing cost. Dissatisfied students will shift to other institutions thus contributing to loss of student base (Bhat and Sofi, 2016). Educational institutions must focus on what their students want rather than what institutions consider important for students (Oldfield and Baron, 2000; Bhat and Sofi, 2016). Therefore, in order to attract large number of students, higher educational institutions must have the understanding about the factors affecting their destination choice decisions. These factors may vary on the basis of socio demographic variables of these students. So, understanding relationship between two is utmost important. It can help the foreign institutions of higher education to design strategies to have strong competitive position.

The students' decision making process for higher education is explored by number of researchers. **Maulana (2022)** conducted research to identify the word of mouth communications that international students obtain while forming their intention to study abroad. The study highlighted that major source of word of mouth communication are friend or relatives who have studied abroad, prospective professors, and

alumni of the institution. **Erdil et al. (2021)** examined the information sources, choice factors and requirements of international students to understand their decision making process. The study pointed out that the university websites are the most used source of information. Also, job opportunities and scholarships are the most important factors for international students. **Pawar et al. (2020)** conducted research to understand factors that motivate international students to choose Indian higher educational institute as study abroad destination. The research found that 'University Characteristics' and influence of 'Social Networks' were the significant factors that motivate students. The research also highlighted the importance of factors like teaching quality, university rankings, courses availability, and safety. **Kakkad and Nair (2015)** conducted a study on the factors influencing students' decision to study abroad with reference to aspiring students from Mumbai. The study focused on the issues like motives of students to study abroad, factors influencing their decision, the benefits that students' desire, barriers that hamper students in study abroad. The findings suggested that the family members are the most important source of information. Relatives are more influential to male than female students. Cost, not meeting GPA requirements, lack of financial assistance are major constraints in taking decisions. **Arar and Yehia (2013)** described the characteristics of the flow of Palestinian students from Israel to study in Jordanian Universities as alternative to study in Israel. Study identified lenient acceptance policy, better chance to graduate, reducing cost and good future employment potential as main factors affecting the flow of students. It also indicated the need for diversified programs and reforms to bring more Palestinian students into Israeli campuses. **Pimpa (2004)** surveyed the influence of families on Thai students' choice of international Education. Five factors were identified as influences from family i.e., finance, information, expectation, competition and persuasion. Study emphasized that there is positive relation between choice and these factors. But the choices of international academic course and university are more personal choices. It means family does not influence the choice of program and university. **Mazzarol and Soutar**

(2002) described the push-pull model to examine the factors which motivate international students to select study destination. The research studies were undertaken in Indonesia, Taiwan, China and India from 1996 to 2000. The study suggested that economic and social forces within the home country push students to study abroad whereas pull factors help students to select the host country first and then institution in that country. The perception of superiority of overseas education over local one is the most influencing factor. The better knowledge about the host country is also one of important influencing factor to choose host country. This paper also highlighted the importance of parents' involvement and word of mouth referrals of Alumni in decision making.

All the studies focused on the factors affecting destination choice of students to study abroad but not relating it to the demographic factors. So, the aim of the study is to determine the effect of demographic factors on determinants of students' destination choice for higher education in foreign institutions. The main research question of this study is; does significant difference exist between the determinants of destination choice of students to study abroad and socio demographic factors? This research question is further divided into two sub-questions:

1. Does significant difference exist between the determinants of destination choice of students to study abroad and their age?
2. Does significant difference exist between the determinants of destination choice of students to study abroad and the region to which they belong?

RESEARCH DESIGN

This research is using a descriptive research method. The descriptive methods are of three types; case study method, observational method, and survey method. This research used a survey method. This research examined whether the factors affecting destination choice of students vary based on selected demographic characteristics like gender and region to which the students belong. Quantitative information about various items is being collected using statistical surveys. Hence, it is a type of empirical research.

HYPOTHESIS

H0 There is no significant difference between determinants of destination choice of students to study abroad and gender of students.

H0 There is significant difference between determinants of destination choice of students to study abroad and region of students

SAMPLING

This research focused on students from Punjab who aspire to study abroad. Target population consists of students who aspire to study abroad after secondary school, graduation or post-graduation. Questionnaires are distributed to these students to collect the data for analysis. The confidentiality of the participants and information secured were taken care of. The name column of the respondent was kept optional. Simple random sampling technique is used to select the sample. The size of the sample is determined by applying formula developed by Cochran in 1963. Hence, the study uses a sample of 384 respondents who are selected randomly from various cities of Punjab.

METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION

Both primary and secondary data was collected for research. Primary data is the data which is collected for the first time. In this study Primary data was collected through self-structured questionnaire. A five-point Likert scale has been used to get responses from the respondents. Respondents were asked to rate the statements on a five-point Likert scale where 1=Strongly Disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Neutral, 4= Agree, and 5= Strongly Agree. First nine demographic questions were asked to get the details of respondents like gender, age, education level, income level of family etc. The questionnaire did not ask personal information mandatorily to ensure confidentiality of student information. The statements in the questionnaire were made on the basis of factors extracted with the help of review of literature. Secondary data is collected for review of literature and to understand the theoretical aspect of the study. In order to identify factors affecting destination choice of students,

Factor analysis was applied using the Principal Component Method with varimax rotation. The study identified major four factors which can affect destination choice of students. These factors are Personal Growth (PG), Role of Marketing & Communications(RMC), Reputation of Host country &Foreign Institution(RHCFI), and Family & Friends(FF). In addition to it there are two factors which can act as barriers that hinder students in getting higher education in foreign institutions. These factors are Score & grade requirements(SGR) and Cost & Visa Issues(CVI).

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics associated with Identified Factors

Factors	Minimum	Maximum	No. of items	Mean	Number	Std. Deviation
PG	1	5	5	4.257	456	0.7778
RMC	1	5	7	3.1622	456	1.02179
RHCFI	1	5	5	4.111	456	0.7883
FF	1	5	3	3.6755	456	1.09756
SGR	1	5	4	2.8553	456	1.25034
CVI	1	5	3	3.6596	456	0.96282

Table 1 shows that in case of factors affecting destination choice of students to study abroad, the highest mean score (4.257) is that of items which measure personal growth. It is closely followed by the reputation of host country & foreign institution, family & friends, and role of marketing & communications respectively. In case of barriers that hinder students in getting higher education in foreign institutions, cost & visa issues emerge as major factor with highest mean score of 3.6596 followed by scores & grade requirements with mean score of 2.8553.

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS

Table 2: Demographic Breakdown of The Sample (N = 456)

Socio Demographic Factors		Total	
		Count	%
Gender	Female	203	45
	Male	253	55
Region	Doaba	74	16.23
	Majha	193	42.32
	Malwa	189	41.45

Table 2 shows that frequencies of demographic factors. Two demographic factors are considered i.e., Gender and Region. The results of demographic profile show that out of the 456 respondent students who aspire to study abroad, 203(45%) were females and 253(55%) were the males. The respondents were also asked to mention their district. Three regions of Punjab are taken i.e., Doaba, Majha and Malwa. 74(16%) students from whom the responses were collected belong to Doaba region while 193(42%) and 189(41%) belong to Majha and Malwa region respectively.

DATA ANALYSIS

In this research work, t-test is applied to find the significant difference between the gender of students with respect to determinants of destination choice of students who aspire to study abroad. ANOVA test is used to test the differences among the means of populations by examining the amount of variation within each of the samples, relative to the amount of variation between the samples. This research used one way ANOVA to find if there is significant difference between the region of students with respect to destination choice factors. Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) is also used to measure specific difference between the pairs of means. It

will determine which means are different. It will help in making pairwise comparisons. It can be used only after ANOVA.

Difference in The Identified Factors with Respect to Gender

Gender was explored to determine if significant difference existed between male and female students' factors affecting destination choice. 203 (45%) of respondents were females and 253 (55%) were males. The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference between the factors affecting destination choice of female and male Students.

Table 3: Difference in the factors affecting destination choice of Female and Male Students for 'Personal Growth' Factor

Factors	Female			Male			t	Sig. (2-tailed)
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean		
PG	4.282	.7665	.0538	4.238	.7877	.0495	.598	.550
RMC	2.9249	.96988	.06807	3.3526	1.02437	.06440	-4.536	.000
RHCFI	3.994	.8315	.0584	4.204	.7403	.0465	-2.847	.005
FF	3.5189	1.11265	.07809	3.8012	1.07100	.06733	-2.750	.006
SGR	2.5246	1.22652	.08608	3.1206	1.20753	.07592	-5.201	.000
CVI	3.4206	.98957	.06945	3.8513	.89772	.05644	-4.865	.000

Table 3 predicts the results of differences in the factors affecting choice of destination to study abroad among female and male students. In case of factors affecting destination choice, 'Personal Growth' emerged as the most important factor for male as well as female students. Considerations for personal growth are slightly more important to male students (M = 4.238, SE = .0495) than female students (M = 4.282, .0538) However, the difference is not significant (t = .598, p > .05). The mean score in case of both male and female students is above 4 which shows that personal growth is an important factor in deciding the country and financial institution to study abroad. This dimension includes items like globally recognized qualification which enhances their future employment prospects. Students feel that degree from a foreign institution will add to their proficiencies and appraise their status. 'Role of

Marketing and Communications' was a more important factor for male (M = 3.3526, SE = .06440) than female students (M= 2.9249, SE = .06807). This difference was significant t = -4.536, p < .05. The results indicate that advertisements on study abroad websites, advice of study visa councilors, promotional materials, and advertisement & fairs are more important influencers for male students than female students. Mean score above 3 also highlight the importance of this dimension for male students in taking the decision. 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution' was another important factor which affected the destination choice of students to study abroad. This factor is more important for male students than female students. The mean value and standard error (M =4.204, SE = .0465) for male students was higher than female students (M = 3.994, SE = .0584). The difference

is significant (t = -2.847, p < .05). It shows that male students give more importance to reputation of the host country and reputation of the foreign institutions of higher education. The factor 'Family & Friends' is more important for male students than female students. The mean value and standard error (M = 3.8012; SE = .06733) for male students is higher than female students (M = 3.5189; SE = .07809). The difference is also significant (t = -2.750, p < .05). Family and friends are more influential for male students than female students. Male students may have chosen a destination to associate and assimilate with their family and friends easily. As far as 'Score & grade requirements' are concerned, male students (M = 3.1206, SE = .07592) are more worried about it than female students (M = 2.5246, SE = .08608). Here the difference is also significant (t = -5.201, p < .05). Male students fear that their score in the language proficiency test (IELTS,

TOEFL, and PTE) might not be sufficient to get admission in foreign institution. Low scores in SAT, GMAT, ACT or GRE can adversely affect their scholarship and obstruct their dream to study abroad. In case of barriers that hinders students from studying abroad, male students (M =3.8513, SE = .05644) are more concerned with 'Cost & Visa Issues' than female students (M = 3.4206, SE = .06945). The difference is significant (t = -4.865, p < .05). The results of the survey demonstrate that the biggest fear while taking the decision to study abroad is cost & visa issues. The mean value above 3 shows that it is a strong constraint to decide. Lack of financial assistance in the form of scholarships is a major hindrance. There is a fear among students that visa issues can act as major obstacle in getting higher education in foreign institutions. The summary of the results of the t-test is as follows;

Table 4: The Summary of The Results of the t-test

Dimension	Null Hypothesis	Result
Personal Growth	There is no significant difference between the gender of students with respect to 'Personal Growth' factor influencing students' factor affecting destination choice for higher education in foreign institutions.	Null hypothesis is accepted
Role of Marketing & Communications	There is no significant difference between the gender of students with respect to 'Role of Marketing & Communications' factor affecting destination choice for higher education in foreign institutions.	Null hypothesis is rejected
Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution	There is no significant difference between the gender of students with respect to 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution' factor affecting destination choice for higher education in foreign institutions.	Null hypothesis is rejected
Family & Friends	There is no significant difference between the gender of students with respect to 'Family & Friends' factor affecting destination choice for higher education in foreign institutions.	Null hypothesis is rejected
Score & grade requirements	There is no significant difference between the gender of students with respect to 'Score & grade requirements' barrier that hinder students in getting Higher Education in Foreign Institutions	Null hypothesis is rejected
Cost & Visa Issues	There is no significant difference between the gender of students with respect to 'Cost & Visa Issues' barrier that hinder students in getting Higher Education in Foreign Institutions	Null hypothesis is rejected

Table 4 summarizes the results of t-test. It shows that significant difference occurs in terms of

gender in five factors. These factors are Role of Marketing & Communications, Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution, Family & Friends, Score & grade requirements, and Cost & Visa Issues. These factors have more impact on male students than female students. However, in case of Personal Growth, the difference is not significant.

Difference in The Identified Factors with respect to Regions of Punjab

For the purpose of this research, three regions of Punjab are taken i.e., Majha, Malwa and Doaba. Students were asked to mention the name of the district to which they belong. Then responses were categorized into three regions. 74(16%) students belong to Doaba region while 193(42%) and 189(41%) belong to Majha and Malwa region respectively. ANOVA test was applied to find if significant difference occurs between the region of students with respect to identified factors. The null hypothesis is that there is no significant difference in the identified factors with respect to regions of Punjab. The detailed analysis is as follows;

Table 5: Difference in the factors affecting Destination choice of students belonging to Different Regions of Punjab.

Factors	Region							
	Doaba		Majha		Malwa		Total	
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.
PG	4.178	.8482	4.164	.7901	4.384	.7208	4.257	.7778
RMC	3.347	.9388	3.285	1.061	2.964	.98237	3.162	1.02179
RHCFI	3.978	.8886	4.097	.7749	4.176	.7568	4.111	.7883
FF	3.680	1.063	3.7134	1.131	3.635	1.08033	3.675	1.09756
SGR	3.0068	1.17768	2.9301	1.26796	2.7196	1.25295	2.8553	1.25034
CVI	3.5092	1.10630	3.7258	.94511	3.6509	.91794	3.6596	.96282

The table 5 shows that all the factors affecting destination choice of foreign institutions are important for students to study abroad. The mean score of all factors is more than 3 except 'role of marketing & communications' for Malwa students. Also, the mean score of 'Personal Growth' factor is high for Malwa students. This shows that they are more influenced by their own ambitions than marketing and communications. The 'Personal Growth' factor is important for students from all regions as the mean value is highest of all the factors in all the three regions.

Table 6: Analysis of Variance showing Significance difference among regions with respect to factors affecting destination choice of Students

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F Ratio	P-value	Result
PG	5.191	2	2.595	4.353	.013	Region has significant effect on Personal Growth
RMC	12.885	2	6.442	6.315	.002	Region has significant effect on Role of Marketing & Communications
RHCFI	2.127	2	1.064	1.717	.181	Region has no effect on Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution
FF	.589	2	.294	.244	.784	Region has no effect on Family & Friend

| SGR | 6.257 | 2 | 3.129 | 2.010 | .135 | Region has no effect on Scale & grade requirements |
| CVI | 2.533 | 2 | 1.267 | 1.368 | .256 | Region has no effect on Cost & Visa Issues |

The ANOVA table 6 clearly predicts that there is no significant difference between the regions with respect to factors of 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution' and 'Family & Friend' but there is significant difference between the regions with respect to factors of 'Personal Growth' and 'Role of Marketing & Communications'. Since the P-value is less than 0.05 for factors of 'Personal Growth' and 'Role of Marketing & Communications', null hypothesis is rejected. The study on this table reveals the importance of factors like Personal Growth, role of marketing & communications in deciding the destination to study in foreign institutions. These factors emerged as critical factors in taking decisions regarding country and foreign institutions to study abroad. Similarly, region has no effect on the 'score & grade requirements' and 'Cost & Visa Issues. Students

from all the regions have the same insight regarding barriers in getting higher education in foreign institutions. Since the P-value is >.05%, null hypothesis is accepted. The study predicts that students are not largely bothered by the score & grade requirements. On the other hand, they are not much affected by visa issues and it does not influence their decision to study abroad.

Since significant difference exists between the regions with respect to factors of 'Personal Growth' and 'Role of Marketing & Communications', Duncan's Multiple Range Test (DMRT) is used to measure specific difference between the pairs of means. It will determine which means are different. It will help in making pairwise comparisons. The results of the test are as follows;

Table 7: Duncan's Multiple Range Test showing Effect of Region on "Personal Growth" Factor

Personal Growth			
Duncan			
Region	N	Subset	
		1	2
Majha	193	4.164	
Doaba	74	4.178	
Malwa	189		4.384
Sig.		.881	1.000

Based on the Duncan Multiple range Test (DMRT), up to 5% level, table 7 shows that there is no significant difference between Majha and

Table 8: Duncan's Multiple Range Test showing Effect of Region on "Role of Marketing & Communications" Factor

Role of Marketing & Communications			
Duncan			
Region	N	Subset	
		1	2
Malwa	189	2.9640	
Majha	193		3.2852
Doaba	74		3.3476

Doaba regions' students but there is significant difference in Malwa region students with respect to personal growth.

Sig.		1.000	.625

Based on the Duncan Multiple range Test (DMRT), up to 5% level, table 8 shows that there is no significant difference between Majha and Doaba regions' students but there is significant difference in Malwa region students with respect to Role of Marketing & Communications. Marketing and communications influence more the students from Majha and Doaba regions than

students from Malwa region.

FINDINGS

T-test suggests that there is no significant difference between male and female students' perception as far as 'Personal Growth' dimension is concerned. But in case of 'Role of Marketing and Communications', 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution', and 'Family & Friends', significant difference exists. These factors have more impact on male students than female students. T-test further indicates that there is significant difference between gender of the students and the barriers that hinder students in getting higher education in foreign institutions. Male students are more concerned with fear factors like 'Score & grade requirements' and 'Cost & Visa Issues' than female students. Male students fear that their score in the language proficiency test and scholarship test might not be sufficient to get admission in foreign institutions and can adversely affect their dream to study abroad. There is also a fear among male students that visa issues can act as a major obstacle in getting higher education in foreign institutions.

With the help of output generated by ANOVA technique, the impact of region on factors affecting destination choice is measured. There is no significant difference between the regions with respect to factors of 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution' and 'Family & Friend' but it has significant impact on factors like 'Personal Growth' and 'Role of Marketing & Communications' in deciding the destination to study in foreign institutions. Students from Malwa region are more influenced by personal ambitions & Marketing and communications. As far as fear factors are concerned, students from different regions of Punjab do not bother much about the score & grade requirements. It may be due to the reason that the students who want to study abroad belong to the category of top scorers. This observation also points to the problem of brain drain. There is however fear of cost and visa issues. Students worry about the fees of the program, lack of financial assistance. There is also the fear that visa issues can act as obstacles in getting higher education in foreign institutions. On the whole, region has no effect on the 'score & grade requirements' and 'Cost &

Visa Issues. Students from all the regions have the same insight regarding barriers in getting higher education in foreign institutions.

CONCLUSION

The present research examines the effect of socio demographic factors on determinants of destination choice of students to study abroad. two demographic criteria Gender and Region are explored. All of the obtained results are almost consistent with the previous studies in the concerned literature. The analysis shows that there is no significant difference between male and female students' perception as far as 'Personal Growth' dimensions is concerned. But in case of 'Role of Marketing and Communications', 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution', and 'Family & Friends', significant difference exists. These factors have more impact on male students than female students. Similarly male students are more concerned with fear factors like 'Score & grade requirements' and 'Cost & Visa Issues' than female students.

All the factors affecting destination choice of foreign institution are important for students to study abroad. Students from Malwa region are more influenced by personal ambitions than Marketing and communications. They use marketing to know about infrastructures. There is no significant difference between the regions with respect to factors of 'Reputation of Host country & Foreign Institution' and 'Family & Friend'. The study reveals the importance of the factors like Personal Growth, role of marketing & communications in deciding the destination to study in foreign institutions. These factors emerged as critical factors in taking decision regarding country and foreign institution to study abroad. As far as fear factors are concerned, students from different regions of Punjab does not bother much about the score & grade requirements. It may be due to the reason that the students who want to study abroad belong to category of top scorers. This observation also points out to the problem of brain drain. There is however fear of cost and visa issues. Students bother about the fees of the program, lack of financial assistance. There is also the fear that visa issues can act as obstacle in getting higher

education in foreign institutions. On the whole, region has no effect on the 'score & grade requirements' and 'Cost & Visa Issues. Students from all the regions have same insight regarding barriers in getting higher education in foreign institutions. However further researches can use other socio demographic factors like age, family income, education level of family etc.

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