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Drivers of overseas migration of students from rural Punjab, India: A review articles

¹Navjot Kaur Sachdeva, ²Shalini Sharma and ³Lavjit Kaur

¹Research Scholar, Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana, Punjab, India

²Professor of Sociology, Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana, Punjab, India

³Assistant Professor of Sociology, Department of Economics and Sociology, Punjab Agricultural University Ludhiana, Punjab, India

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Corresponding Author: Navjot Kaur Sachdeva

Abstract

Migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups from their place of origin to another country, voluntarily or non-voluntarily and settle there permanently or for some period of time for different reasons. The present study was based on secondary data from the various research papers and existing literature including data, case-studies and statistics. Study revealed the most important push factors of migration were growing unemployment, agricultural distress and the declining income of agriculture, peer pressure, gender inequality, the dowry system, social issues like the drug menace, etc. The primary pull factors of migration include the desire to earn more, have a better life, a free society, acquire higher education etc. The report emphasis the SMs impact on Punjab and its effects on left behind families and how brain-drain impacts the society and culture of Punjab. The literature review highlights the research gaps, reasons, impacts and make recommendations for future studies on Punjabi diaspora and student migration.

Keywords: Student migration, brain-drain, youth migration, Punjabi diaspora, migration

Introduction

Migration refers to the movement of individuals or groups from their place of origin to another country, voluntarily or non-voluntarily and settle there permanently or for some period of time for different reasons. The term was first used to refer the Greeks in the Hellenic world and Jews living outside Israel (Gruen 2002). Migration can occur over short distances or cover vast distances, involving regular seasonal movements or occasional long-distance journeys (Kaur 2022 and Sharma *et al* 2023) ^[25, 49]. History indicates the migration of individuals, communities and tribes from one place to another for shelter, food and wealth (Narain 2012 and Kaur 2022) ^[41, 33].

In current times, Indian diaspora is the strongest diaspora in the world. In terms of international migration, India is the leading country of origin and has always been a labour-sending country to other parts of the world (Kaur and Singh 2021) ^[26]. The number of international migration doubled between 1980 and 2010 from 103 million to 214 million and further to approximately 258 million in 2017, about 3.4 per cent of the world's population according to United Nations (UNDESA 2017) ^[58]. India has emerged as the largest remittance-receiving country in 2021, while Mexico pushed China to third rank, according to the World Bank by Verghese and Qureshi (2023).

The majority of Indians living overseas reside in Punjab, the country's top agricultural state. After Kerala, Punjab is the state that sends the most foreign migrants (Nanda, 2010; Pahwa, 2024) ^[40, 44]. In the context of higher education, the

relationship between student mobility and post-study migration—often referred to as the "education-migration nexus"—becomes more and more important (Robertson, 2013). Many national governments have backed the effort of universities around the developed world to increase the number of overseas students attending their schools (Bolsmann & Miller, 2008) ^[6], and many national governments have supported this process (Brotherhood, 2020) ^[7]. Choudaha, R. (2017) ^[11], revealed that the number of Indian students studying abroad expanded significantly between 1999 and 2006, rising by 63 per cent to reach 145,539, as opposed to the slower rise of 25 per cent between 2006 and 2013 to reach 181,872.

International student mobility is majorly divided into four categories. First is degree or diploma mobility where students are enrolled in higher education institutions in another country for the entire degree program. Second is credit, temporary or short-term mobility. It is also known as student exchange program. In this category students are enrolled in a higher education institution in some different country for one academic semester or year. Third is transnational education where students are enrolled with foreign university programme, but complete their education degree in their home country. Last is the short-term travel study tour which is developed as a part of home university course and usually lasts two to four weeks abroad (Sharma *et al.*, 2023) ^[49]. There are many challenges faced by students when moving abroad which include homesickness, language barriers, culture shock, getting visa documents

order, financial difficulties and most importantly, the complex application process itself. But with time students get adjusted and cope with those difficulties (Pande, 2021) ^[45].

Off-late cases of return migration of students is also making around the news (India Today May 17, 2023). Despite the increase in research on different facets of migration, a consensus on factors and impact of large scale student migration is still lacking (Collyer & Hass, 2012) ^[13]. The major objective of the study was identify the dynamics of overseas migration of students from rural Punjab.

Theoretical perspective

Migration studies is an under-theorised field of social-scientific inquiry, in which the recent trend has been one of theoretical regression rather than progress. Earlier contributions to the field – such as Ronald Skeldon's work on migration transitions primarily focuses on the idea that migration patterns change significantly as a country develops economically, moving from predominantly rural-to-urban migration in early stages to more complex patterns like urban-to-urban migration and circular movements in advanced societies, essentially mirroring the stages of the demographic transition theory, often referred to as the "migration transition. In human capital models of migration, the focus is on the individual's decision to move and that this decision is conditional upon the return he/she expects to receive from moving in contrast to what is expected from staying (Khwaja, 2002) ^[37]. (Hicks, 1932) ^[20] argument has reiterated that differences in net economic advantages, chiefly wages, are the main cause of migration. (Cohen, 2011) ^[12] focused on migrant's experiences, perceptions and identity like transnational, diaspora and creolisation theory which can all be situated within the symbolic interactionist perspective in social theory.

Modernisation Theory: This theory originated from the ideas of German sociologist, Max Weber and provides the basis for the modernisation paradigm and was developed by Talcott Parson. Most of the anthropological research on migration and development up till mid-1970s was based on the modernisation theory. This theory defines migration as a process of social mobility and the unit of migration is considered to be an individual. An individual was studied in two spheres: before migration and after migration. In the before migration phase, anthropologists tried to understand the reason behind migration and what all factors forced people to migrate, and in the after migration phase, migrants were studied for their 'adaptation', 'assimilation' and 'adjustment' in the place of immigration

Push factors migration from Punjab

Unpredictable weather patterns, debt loads, and low agricultural productivity have all led to the farming crisis and agrarian hardship. People's incomes have fallen as a result of this crisis, and their vulnerability has increased, making them more vulnerable to exploitation. The high rate of youth unemployment in rural areas has also prompted people to migrate illegally from India. Take Punjab's unemployment rate, for instance. The state fell from 13th place in 2005 to 16th place in 2022, according to the India Employment Report 2024. During the same time span, the unemployment rate among educated youth (15–29 years

old) increased dramatically from 22.95 percent to 26.33 percent. Economic hardship and poverty are significant drivers of illegal migration. Limited access to quality education hampers skill development among the youth, forcing them to seek high paying unskilled jobs outside. Social and familial expectations contribute to the pressure on young individuals to provide stable income to their families.

Methodology

The present study was based on subordinate data from the various research papers and existing literature that were carried out on student migration Punjab. Many studies and case studies have been reviewed from various sources such as: newspaper, research articles, reports, thesis and journal etc. to understand the causes, consequences of overseas migration and its impact. The research databases was selected from various sources like scopus, academia, research gate, google scholar, pub-med, springer etc. The search criteria included the newspaper, articles and journal etc. to understand the cause, consequences of overseas migration and its impact.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

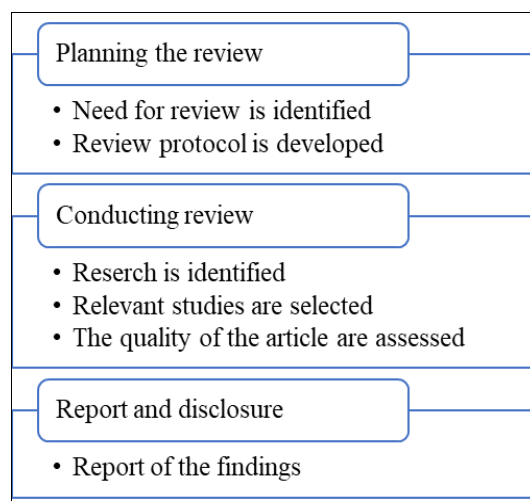
The database was searched for inclusion or exclusion using the following criteria. The verify substantive substance, in all the research papers that were selected in the earlier stages were scanned by reading their abstracts. The duplicate articles were removed. After screening the abstracts, the full text of the selected papers was checked to confirm that they were consistent with the research purpose. Finally, 50 manuscripts were selected for inclusion. To meet the exclusion criteria, some papers had been eliminated because of irrelevant content and also on the basis of repetition of the content, duplication of papers. In process of selecting papers, keywords like "Migration", "Irregular migration", "Role", "Benefits", "Challenges", and "Consequences" were searched in the above-mentioned scientific database. Further, nine elements were extracted from the selected papers for review which was presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Data extraction from the selected papers

Criteria	Description
Title	Title of the paper
Author(s)	Author name
Paper Type	Review, research and conceptual paper
Country	Author's country
Publication year	Year in which paper has been published
Publication citation	Citation retrieved from different database
Per year citation	Citation/ number of years= per year citation
Publication type	Published in Journal, conference issue, reports, newspaper, news articles and book
Paper theme	Challenges and consequences

Results and Discussion

The results of bibliometric analysis shows that the sources, most of the sources were from the journals and reports. Others were reports, news articles, newspapers and books. Data were collected from international journals and reports as well.



Source modified from (Michel-Villarreal *et al.*, 2019)

Fig 1: Phases followed in systematic literature review

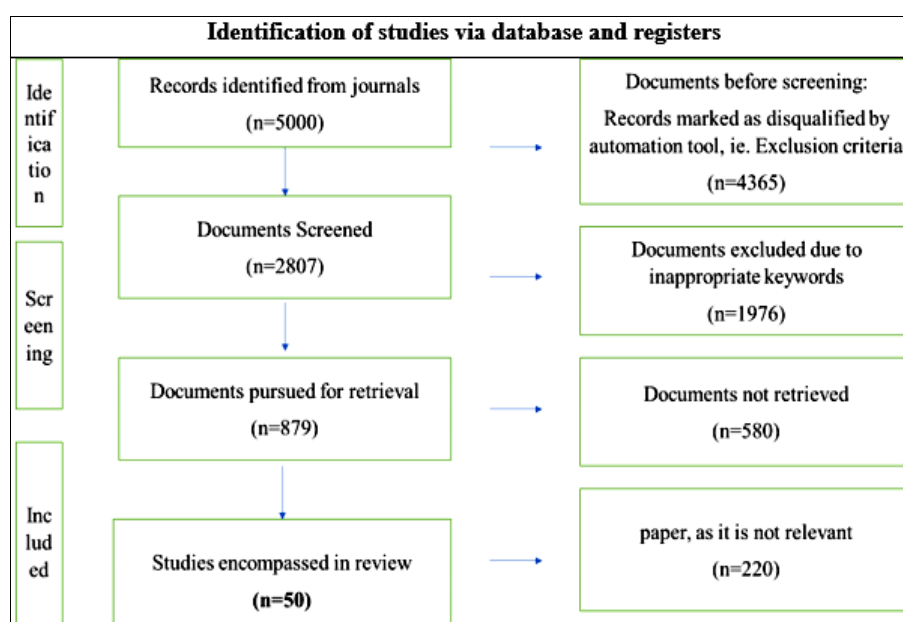


Fig 2: Diagram of PRISMA for searching databases for publications related to systematic reviews

In table 2, inclusion and exclusion criteria has been used to search and identify the relevant research paper/ literature or studies to ensure the relevance and validity. Articles and review papers, newspapers articles and conference proceedings were preferred selected to meet inclusion

criteria. The literature had been published after 1999 because the literature before 1999 had not any relevancy with the present scenario of student migration. Above all these studies were restricted only to the subject area.

Table 2: Both inclusion and exclusion criteria were used to search the database

Conditions	Inclusion	Exclusion
Literature type	Articles, reviews, newspapers, conference proceedings	Book chapters, book series, editorial
Language	English	Non-English
Timeline	>1999	<1999
Subject area	Migration, student migration, diaspora, social sciences	Environmental sciences, veterinary, engineering.

Further in Table 2, exclusion criteria were applied to filter studies and remove literature which were not relevant to subject. Even literature published in non english i.e. Hindi and Punjabi or any other language were also be eliminated.

SWOT Analysis

In the context of overseas student migration, a SWOT

analysis helps to understand the internal strengths and weaknesses of a migrant community or program, alongside external opportunities and threats related to their migration experience. It's a strategic planning tool used to assess the overall situation.

International education presents a range of Strengths for students, including access to better job opportunities,

exposure to diverse experiences, and the chance to pursue higher-quality education. Many students benefit from scholarship opportunities and the potential for financial stability, especially when part-time work or post-graduation employment is available. Additionally, the flexibility and variety of academic programs, coupled with health benefits in some countries, contribute to overall satisfaction and personal growth. This experience also fosters resilience and independence, as students learn to adapt to new environments.

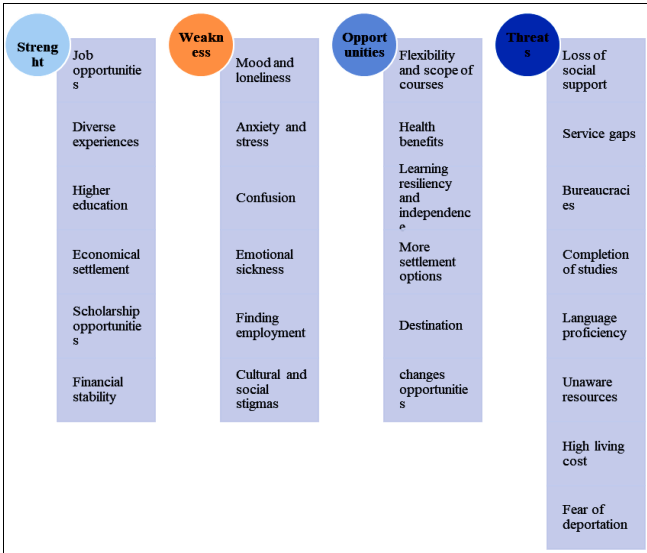
However, there are notable Weaknesses that can impact the student experience also face various hurdles like with loneliness, anxiety, and emotional stress, especially when they were separated from their families and usual support systems. Language barriers, emotional confusion, and lack of awareness of available resources further complicate their ability to adjust within the environment. For some reasons challenges in completing their studies and maintaining academic performance can also arise due to these internal stressors.

Looking outward, there are significant Opportunities for growth and long-term benefits. International students often gain increased independence, access to more settlement options, and sometimes the ability to change destinations in search of better opportunities. They can build global networks, gain cross-cultural competencies, and integrate into new societies, which enhances their career prospects and personal development.

Despite these opportunities, there are also Threats that students must navigate. Students faced numerous threats in minds which make them uneasy to adopt that particular environment to be stable. These include less in social support services, bureaucratic hurdles, and high living costs, which can make the experience overwhelming. In some cases, students may also face fear of deportation, especially when visa policies are unclear or strict. Additionally,

cultural stigmas and social discrimination can lead to feelings of exclusion, making integration more difficult.

Swot Analysis of Student Migration



Source: Created by author by reviewing the literature

Fig 3: SWOT analysis of SMs

Challenges faces by Student migration

Generally, students faced two type of departure it could be pre-departure challenges and post-departure challenges (Qamber, 2024) [47]. This article addresses obstacles confronting by students within the home countries. The challenges are categorized into pre-departure. The findings will reveal pre-departure challenges, such as obtaining accurate information, understanding the admission procedure, and preparing documents for visa acquisition.

Table 3: Challenges faced by student migrants

Challenges	Authors
Legal challenges	Kaur (2022) [34], Kaur et al. (2024) [27, 28, 35, 36], Kaur (2019) [29, 30], Shalini et al. (2023)
Psychological challenges	Agnihotri et al. (2022) [3], Agnihotri et al. (2022) [4], Garha (2022) [17], Deepika and Aggarwal (2022) [14], Kaur et al. (2020) [31], Gupta et al. (2023) [19]
Economic challenges	Kaur et al. (2023) [26], Usman et al. (2025), Mapril (2013),
Cultural challenges	Martin et al. (2014), Abdusamatov et al. (2025) [1]

Students face language barriers, financial issues, and cultural adjustment when they were in the host countries are called post-departure challenges. (Skariah and Sivarenjini, 2024) [55] also explained that migrants, especially those who arrive for educational or economic opportunities, often face a range of challenges that significantly impact their stability and well-being. One major issue for migration is, which can arise from overstaying visas, including the expiration of study permits, or navigating complex and often confusing immigration systems. The reasons behind such situations include limited pathways to permanent residency, lack of post-study work opportunities, and financial or personal pressures that prevent migrants from returning home and often shaped by media narratives or political rhetoric. The consequences of these challenges can be severe, ranging from job insecurity and housing instability to mental health struggles due to fear of deportation or legal repercussions. On a broader level, the community impacts of migration

were mixed: while migrants contribute economically, socially, and culturally to their new environments, negative perceptions and policy gaps can strain community relations, leading to social division and reduced trust in institutions. Ultimately, the challenges faced by migrants highlight the need for more inclusive, humane, and flexible migration policies that consider long-term integration and support.

Constraints faced by Student Migration

One of the most important indicators in Scient metric assessment is the citation analysis. Citation analysis measures the relative importance or impact of an author, article or publication by counting the number of times that author, article or publication had been cited by other works. The present review paper tried to evaluate the research articles on the basis of latest year, access by researchers, students and come up with dominant publications.

Table 4: Constraints faced by students overseas with year of publication and citations.

Authors	Years and Citations	Constraints
Tijmen Weber and Christof Van Mol	2023, 33	Tuition fees and other costs for students have been steadily rising in most countries for international students, decreases the quality of education and politicians who wish to curb migration.
Kiran Jyoti Kaur and A K Sinha	2021, 2	Travel restrictions due to covid, border restrictions, over analytical system and embassy, visa processing delays, shift to online learning, economic impact and stress of visas.
Kiran Jyoti Kaur and Anil Kishore Sinha	2023, 2	Impact of children transitional migration on the left behind elderly parents, remittances received by parents, decrease physical and emotional support.
Nivedita Agnihotri, Apra and Anupma	2022, 14	The expenditure on migration, utilization of remittances and brain-drain.
Kyra Pahwa	2024, 2	Debt and distress on youth, mental impact on farmers, farmer suicides, corruption and drug abuse, less income and low employment.
Ranju Bhargav, Dr. Puneeta Sharma	2022, 2	Population boom, lack of work prospects, loss of talent, flow of young brains and talent from one country to another, barriers in Punjab's development.
Ritu Pandhi Nayyar	2023, 3	Loss of persons from rural areas, impact on the level of output and development of rural areas, the influx of population impacts negative on urban areas, uneven population distribution, exploitation of migrants, brain-drain.
Lilach Marom	2021, 31	Punjabi student's underlined experience by labour mobility, irregular immigration policies new tensions with older, complicity of Canadian higher education in lower-skill immigration and marketization of international higher education
Lilach Marom	2016, 21	Multiculturalism in teacher education, complex web of privileges and oppressions
Riya Gupta, Gagandeep Kaur, Param Ayush Thakur, Atul Dadhwal, Anil Kumar Pandey	2023, 7	The challenges faced by migrants before, during, and after their journey, brain-drain, capital drain, loss of Demographic Dividend, unemployment in hosting countries, peer pressure of migration and under debt households.
Shalini sharma, Amit guleria and Manjeet Kaur	2023, 2	Expenditure on emigration, different financial aspects of migration, sale of assets, debts and sources of borrowings and brain drain.
S K Nayak and Jaswinder	2023, 5	Currently the focus is on sending students overseas, brain-drain, employment, reasons of migration, refugees, asylum-seekers and as unaccompanied minors. Forced reasons of migration such as poverty. Conflicts and unemployment. Push factors- high unemployment, increasing population, strong tradition of emigration, inappropriate state government policies, lack of education facilities and less industrial development.
Amanpreet Kaur & Prabhjot Kaur	2024, 9	Impact on agrarian society, disinterest in farming of youth, political instability and major mooring factors.
Rishi Ram Kattel and Mahesh Sapkota	2018, 24	Scarcity of skilled manpower in this sector. The magnitude and determinants of the brain drain of Nepali agriculture and veterinary graduates to abroad, showing that brain drain. Low salary count, poor education and overburden.
Navjot Kaur, Gaganpreet kaur and Lavjit kaur	2024, 1	Brain-drain, unemployment, expensive education and left behind families.
Navjot Kaur, Gaganpreet Kaur and Lavjit Kaur	2024,3	The psychological and health problems of the left behind parents and families, problems faced by parents when they visit abroad to their children.
Nivedita Agnihotri	2024, 3	Gender discrimination in migration, caste system in migration and lack of visa process. It is observed that prime reason behind the international migration from Punjab to other countries is the lack of suitable work opportunities.

International migration from Punjab was driven by a complex web of socio-economic, political, and cultural factors. Table 4 highlighted that rising tuition fees and other costs for international students, along with inconsistent visa processes and restrictive immigration policies, have made migration more stressful and uncertain (Webber and Mol 2023). The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated this through travel restrictions, online learning, and embassy delays. While remittances benefit families of left behind, migration also leads to emotional strain, particularly on elderly parents who lose physical and emotional support. The high cost of emigration often results in families incurring debt, selling assets, and facing financial pressure. This distress, especially among the youth, contributes to mental health challenges, drug abuse, and even farmer suicides. (Maron, 2021) ^[38] in Punjab, a severe brain-drain was noticed in young generation, skilled individuals leave in search of better opportunities to abroad, resulting in a lack of talent,

development stagnation, and an imbalanced population distribution. It also affects both rural and urban areas- rural areas lose agriculture and industrial labor, while urban centers face overcrowding and resource stress. The experiences of Punjabi students in countries like Canada highlight issues of scarcity of labor, labor exploitation and the commodification of education (Kattel and Sapkota, 2024) ^[24]. Gender and caste discrimination further complicate migration experiences. Ultimately, limited job opportunities, political instability, inflation and underdeveloped infrastructure in Punjab remain the primary push factors behind this enduring trend.

Case studies

From Punjab, international students are facing legal and psychological challenges. Now, US government decided and raised a strong step to detaining and revoking student visa. While, government sending students into detention

centres with plain clothes and hauling students off in unmarked cars to detention centres. Students are afraid to leave their apartments even to buy groceries. He mentioned that a post-doctoral fellow was suspected that he was having link with terrorist group. Number of international students were facing isolation, insecurity and many other issue for their survival in that particular country.

Second case of NXXXX and GXXXX as they mentioned that, from Malwa region of Punjab many youngsters leave country. Who are from landowning class and caste migrating was also on student visas to western countries for their better future. They mentioned that, the agrarian crisis, reduction in government spending on agriculture as well as research and development, rising cost of cultivation had a major factors too. Reverse dowry, contract marriages, visas centres became more popular and youth or students leaving Punjab through these routes.

Conclusion

The few past years, however, there had been a significant increase in the number of people leaving Punjab to seek better life opportunities abroad. The reasons for this flight from Punjab to foreign destinations was complex and multifaceted. Going abroad had now become a trend for the youngsters mainly from Punjab. Everyone who had gone out of India to study abroad describe the entire experience as life-changing. Studying abroad or outside India, not only gives you to access the quality education but also to change the way you look at things, handle difficult situations and tackle problems. By themselves were contribute to a broader understanding of the intricate social, economic, and cultural factors that drive migration and shape the experiences of migrants and their communities. Overall, the flight of residents of Punjab to foreign destinations was a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that warrants careful attention and analysis.

By examining the socioeconomic and religious interconnections of a population with a long tradition and history of movement, nearly all studies contribute to the Indian experience of transnationalism and the culture of migration in the Punjab region.

The work outlines a certain degree of emotional and psychological gravity that permeates the cultural and social space of the region through accounts of people's aspirations, in context of the multi-million-dollar migration industry and the influence it has on the narratives established with media, employment and educational opportunities and everyday lived experiences including religion as a coping mechanism in dealing with the problems and hurdles of migration reiterating the global realities within localised fields.

From the above discussions it can be concluded that migration is a global phenomenon and people move from one country to another due to various reasons. It is difficult to say that why some people prefer to choose a particular country for migration rather than others. Thus, both push and pull factors played an important role in migration. The role of remittances is also crucial for the progress of the remittance receiving area; it helps to eliminate poverty and improve the standard of living of remittances receiving households.

JEL Codes

J12, I31, J13, F22, Z13, Z61

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