

International Mobility Opportunities for Indian Students

By Anish Raj Garg

Background



India's new National Education Policy (NEP) has outlined guidelines for collaborations in internationalization of higher education. While the Indian government is keen to control “brain drain” and invite foreign institutions to set up campuses in India, the reality is that due to the large numbers of young Indians who are keen to avail of high-quality global education, there is an ever-increasing number of Indian students who still prefer or choose to study abroad.

This paper aims to discuss the international mobility of Indian students who wish to study abroad. Through desk research and other available data, this paper has tried to compare and contrast the current status (2023) of the numbers of Indian students current studying at higher education institutions in the top four receiving countries - the UK, the USA, Australia, and Canada.

As per the Ministry of Education, a staggering **7.5 lakh students** from India went to study abroad in 2022. According to News18, most of the students going abroad for higher education are from Punjab and Andhra Pradesh contribute 12 percent each to the overall number of Indian students who leave to study overseas.

Studying abroad can be a life-changing experience for Indian students. It can help them learn about **new cultures, languages, and ways of life**. It can also help students to grow as a person and to develop the skills and knowledge that they need to succeed in their future career. Additionally, experts believe that students prefer studying abroad as they believe they can find better **academic opportunities, career prospects and availability of financial aid and scholarships**.

USA

While the concept of the Great American Dream is idealistic, it is this very notion that has made the United States a distinctive and desirable country to study in. According to the Department of Education, approximately 200,000 students from India relocated to the USA to pursue higher education in 2022, making it a 20% increase from the previous year. According to Open Doors 2020, Indian students at U.S. colleges and universities contributed \$7.6 billion to the U.S. economy in 2020.

The most popular courses which Indian students pursue in the U.S. are in the fields of Engineering, Business Management and Computer Science. These successful numbers can be attributed to numerous bilateral initiatives launched, including but not limited to EducationUSA, and GIAN(Global Initiative of Academic Networks).

In addition to self-motivated mobility, several other factors encourage Indian students to move to the US. One major factor influencing mobility is the **academic diversity** offered by American colleges, with more than 4,000 recognizable universities which include Harvard University, Yale University and University of California, Berkley. These colleges provide an overwhelming range of courses. The U.S. education system provides choices that offer a wider range of learning opportunities, ensuring that nearly all students pursue a course of their liking.

Secondly, **academic freedom and flexibility** are driving forces that increase student mobility. Unlike other countries where students are required to choose a major at the beginning of college, US universities are known to allow their students to experiment with different courses which offers academic flexibility. This flexibility allows students to develop a well-rounded mindset and avoid investing in a field of study they may not be interested in.

Thirdly, **scholarships** increase mobility of young Indian aspirants looking to pursue education in the US. Numerous colleges, NGOs, and institutions offer scholarships that help reduce a student's financial limitations. These scholarships provide support and enable students to pursue their education. An example of a scholarship program is the very popular and prestigious Fulbright program, which "enables graduate students, young professionals, and artists from abroad to study and conduct research in the United States".

Finally, it is projected that in the next two decades, India – Asia's third-largest economy – will add up to 300 million people to its workforce, equivalent to the entire US population (*IC3 2018 'A world on the move'*). Many Indian students wish to relocate as the US job market offers a **wide range of career opportunities**. Furthermore, many students believe that MNCs (multinational corporations) generally have a more structured and less uncertain work environment. US universities improve networking opportunities for students. Professors are open to sharing valuable career options, while universities host job fairs and counseling sessions help students position themselves

better for their future. Additionally, universities with extensive alumni networks allow students to connect with experts.

However, there are many limitations that reduce the mobility of Indian students. Pursuing education can have a significant cost, including but not limited to tuition fees, living expenses, travel expenditures, and visa fees. According to College Board, in 2019, “the average tuition fees in the US were \$10,230 for state residents and \$26,290 for non-residents, compared to an average of \$35,830 at private non-profit colleges”. Thus, several Indian students encounter **financial constraints** which reduce their mobility.

The extensive admission requirements imposed by American universities result in a reduced number of students opting to apply to the US. The well-rounded qualities that universities seek are often lacking in students from developing countries. While countries like India excel in academic excellence, they often fall short in promoting extracurricular engagement in their schools. Most high schools in India promote a **study-centric mindset**, resulting in **limited** opportunities for students to develop their **holistic** and **extracurricular** skills. Cultural adjustment and mobility have a connection between each other. Students have to adjust to a new cultural environment while pursuing their education goals. While adjusting some challenges that can be faced include homesickness, communication barriers, and unfamiliarity. Therefore, these factors make the mobility experience more challenging.

Political factors are one of the main threats that impact Indian students' mobility. Visa policies are a primary reason why many are not able to go to the US. Approximately 5% of the total applicants who applied for a US student visa were rejected. Stringent visa requirements, lengthy application processes, or restrictions on student visas can discourage or limit the mobility of Indian students. Additionally, immigration policies and bilateral relations influence student mobility.

While scholarships strengthen student mobility, they also create a lot of competition. Many students rely on scholarships, but the number available is limited, leading to intense competition among students.

However, the U.S. education system is widely recognized as one of the best in the world, and with the assistance of donors, higher education institutions, NGOs and bilateral initiatives, the accessibility of U.S. universities is sure to increase over the years.

While career opportunities, cultural diversity and academic flexibility are factors that encourage students to study in the USA. The quality of education and unique curriculum are also additional factors that increase a student's mobility. Indian students are likely to continue to choose the U.S. as one of the leading destinations for their higher studies.

United Kingdom

Apart from the majestic Big Ben and the royal castles, the UK has been a top destination for Indian students due its renowned universities. As per The Guardian, in 2022, 140,000 students went to the UK to pursue higher education. Most international students look to the UK to pursue their higher education in business, law, and automotive engineering. The impressive growth in the number of students studying in the UK over the last few years can be attributed to alliances like the TNE strategic partnership*.

India's Commonwealth membership boosts student mobility by providing scholarships, exchange programs, and simplified visa processes. Cultural familiarity and educational partnerships further enhance opportunities for Indian students to study abroad and broaden their horizons within the Commonwealth community.

One benefit of pursuing education in the UK is the presence of a **diverse culture**, which helps students connect with their own culture, reducing homesickness and cultural shock. Additionally, students get more understanding of various cultures. As per ONS(Office of National Statistics), the UK has an Indian community of about 1 million people. Students feel more comfortable having knowledge about the community. It allows students to feel more at ease with their surroundings and connected to the incoming students, thereby increasing their sense of belonging. This assistance can encompass both cultural and social adjustments.

Another advantage of the UK education system is the **short duration of courses**(1, 2 and 4 years). Attending courses with shorter durations has a positive impact on mobility in the UK as it reduces the cost of living and tuition fees. As a result, students on a restricted budget can benefit from this option.

The UK has been known to house some of the most **difficult** courses in the world. The country has an astounding 6.4% drop out rate. Academic adjustment is an influential factor that determines mobility of students. The academic culture varies drastically in the UK. Indian students who are pursuing their education in the UK may encounter difficulties while adjusting to the high academic standards and strict deadlines.

The UK has been known to offer a **highly professional and competitive environment**. This kind of environment also affects their emotional well-being, causing them distress that negatively impacts their ability to adjust and cope with the stress they face.

Finally, the cost of living significantly affects mobility and is an influential factor. As per collegeuidia, the average cost of living for an international student is 1,350 GBP in 2020. Therefore, many international students may face challenges financing their education and other expenses. Consequently, studying in the UK becomes a less feasible option as many students simply aren't able to afford the tuition fee.

As per ONS(Office of National Statistics), the UK employment rate was estimated at 75.8% in December 2022 to February 2023, 0.2 percentage points higher than September to November 2022. The UK has been known to provide **experiential working opportunities**. By undertaking internships or part-time employment, students can acquire practical work experience and acquire relevant skills. Such practical experience strengthens their academic skills and increases encouragement. Additionally, many are able to gain the necessary confidence about their future.

Scholarships present immense opportunities which make studying more affordable. **Scholarships and financial aid** can assist with some or all of the costs associated with education. These financial opportunities help reduce the financial burden of students and enable them to take advantage of mobility opportunities. There are several scholarships for the U.K. such as the Chevening Scholarships. As per Chevening, Chevening is the UK government's international scholarships programme. Funded by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and partner organizations, awards are offered to study in the UK for one year on a fully funded master's degree course.

The mobility of Indian students has been impacted severely by Brexit (Britain exiting the European Union). Brexit has impacted the immigration policies the UK now has. The end of the free movement of EU citizens resulted in the UK treating EU (European Union) and non-EU students on equal terms. While these changes are still to be implemented, the number of student visas issued can be overwhelming now as EU students are part of the pool of international students. Another factor that influences mobility is the choices students have started to make after Brexit. The UK's changing immigration policies around Brexit have created a perception among Indian students that the country is less welcoming to international students. This perception may affect their decision-making process when it comes to mobility, leading them to consider alternate study destinations.

In conclusion, the mobility of Indian students in the UK has been significantly influenced by various factors. The presence of strong educational ties, historical connections, and cultural familiarity between India and the UK has facilitated an increased flow of Indian students to pursue their studies. Additionally, initiatives such as scholarships, exchange programs, and streamlined visa processes have further enhanced mobility opportunities. As a result, Indian students continue to contribute to the academic and cultural diversity of the UK while gaining valuable international experiences.

Australia

According to StudyAustralia, Australian cities are often rated as some of the most enjoyable places to live globally. As per meridian, the number of Indian students in Australia has grown tremendously from 10,073 in 2002 to 86,782 in 2022. Some of the most popular courses in Australia which international students wish to pursue are Nursing, Computer Science Engineering and Cybersecurity. Comprehensive national

strategies released by the Australian government can be credited for the major success of incoming international students.

Australia is known for providing students with the **best standards of living for exceptionally low cost**. International students generally have the option to secure part-time employment to cover their living expenses. The average cost of living in Canberra is AUD 1823 which can be compared to the high average cost of living in London is AUD 3166.

Students from Australia who are **enrolled** in internationally recognized universities or institutions can take advantage of the status that comes with these establishments. Australian companies often look for qualifications from Australian universities as they believe that the quality of education is certainly exceptional.

The **academic pressure** of Australian universities has been known to be less. They are able to focus on personal development as well. Foreign students in Australia have the opportunity to work part-time while they pursue their studies, which can significantly reduce their expenses associated with studying and living in the country. The minimum wage in Australia is presently AUD 18 per hour and is adequate to cover a considerable amount of their living expenses including but not limited to rent, groceries, and transportation.

In 2022, Australia and India signed an agreement named **Free Trade Agreement**. According to the agreement, every student who goes to study in Australia will get an opportunity to work there, based on their educational qualification. Free trade agreements (FTAs) typically have the objective of minimizing trade barriers and tariffs among nations, with a potential impact on the education field. As a result, students from FTA member countries might enjoy benefits such as reduced tuition fees or loosened visa rules. Additionally, FTAs often include provisions for the recognition and equivalence of qualifications between participating countries.

There are various scholarship programs available for international students in Australia. Scholarship programs are designed to provide financial support and help Indian students afford education, therefore improving their accessibility to it. Scholarships such as the Global Academic Excellence Scholarship offers a 50% reduction in the tuition fee of selected applicants.

The pandemic had caused many college students and faculty to abruptly cancel their academic plans. Most international students in Australia found themselves isolated and grappling with a new mode of study. Several courses offered by Australian universities were offered online and consequently made students less motivated.

Australia and India's economic partnership has improved the situation between the countries. The mobility of Indian students in Australia has witnessed notable growth and offers promising opportunities. Australia's strong educational institutions, diverse courses, and favorable immigration policies have attracted a significant number of

Indian students. Scholarships, work-study options, and support services further enhance mobility prospects, fostering academic and cultural exchange between India and Australia. Indian students continue to enrich the Australian education landscape while gaining valuable international exposure.

Canada

From listening to the roar of water cascades falling free from hundreds of meters per second into crystal clear waters to conquering the vast stretches of gorgeous mountain terrain, Canada is home to some of nature's greatest gifts. As per applyboard, 195,000 Indian students were approved to study in Canada in 2022. The fields of study that Indian students typically pursue in Canada are popularly related to Information Technology, Engineering, Hospitality Management. The sharp increase in the number of students coming to Canada can be credited to the more welcoming immigration policies.

Canada is known as a country with **educational institutions of the greatest quality**. They are recognisable for their research contribution and academic excellence. Some of the globally well-known higher education institutions are McGill University and University of Toronto. Students can find well-designed programs that provide comprehensive knowledge and skill development. Recognition given by Canadian universities holds great importance as they allow students to opt for better jobs.

Canada is known for having **affordable** tuition fees and therefore making it more accessible to international students. For those who possess knowledge on the matter, it is widely known that attending a particular educational institution is a reasonably priced option. Indian students can explore abundant opportunities for scholarships, grants, and part-time jobs to offset the cost of their education.

Canada is an excellent place if students are looking for **post graduate work permits**. The Post-Graduation Work Permit program is specifically designed to provide opportunities for international students to gain work experience in Canada after successfully completing their studies. Students who have studied at a Canadian educational institution can receive a work permit, allowing them to work for up to three years following their graduation. The length of the work permit granted depends on the duration of the program of study that was completed.

While it may not seem like a factor for most students, however, in Canada difficulties caused by **weather** play an influential role. It is worth noting that numerous immigrants in Canada originate from tropical nations and may be accustomed to living in regions with only two seasons annually. For instance, Canada has four seasons, including

winter, spring, summer, and fall, but the extent to which each season is experienced differs depending on the region.

Additionally, **cultural diversity** has a positive impact for most students. However, sometimes it reduces mobility for international students. As an international student in Canada, your initial interactions in the classroom may expose you to people from diverse backgrounds and cultures, considering the country's reputation for cultural diversity. Cultural shock is a common experience for many foreign students in their first few months in Canada.

Canada has **multiple research** projects going on, which the students can easily join. The National Research Council, which is a group of government agencies and businesses, also allocates its funds to support research projects. Canada places great importance on research and innovation, offering numerous chances for Indian students to participate in advanced research endeavors spanning different fields.

Canada has been known for providing **students with visas** and therefore, the networking opportunities have become more accessible and easy. As they start building their professional network in Canada, students will start to encounter individuals at various career stages. As newcomers, students can use this chance to gain insights on how new entrants to the industry were able to secure opportunities and how experienced professionals have advanced in their respective fields.

In conclusion, the mobility of Indian students in Canada has seen remarkable growth and presents a wealth of opportunities. Canada's world-class universities, inclusive education system, and welcoming environment have attracted a large number of Indian students. The availability of scholarships, work permits, and post-graduation pathways contribute to enhanced mobility prospects, fostering cross-cultural exchange and academic excellence. Indian students continue to contribute to Canada's diverse society while gaining valuable international exposure and enriching their educational journey.

Comparative Data

Stat/Country	USA	Australia	Canada	UK
No. Of students from India	200,000	87,000	139,000	140,000
Contribution to the Economy	\$7.6B	\$5.5B	\$2.2B	GBP 1.8B

Conclusion

One of the most influential factors that encourage student mobility is cultural and academic diversity. Most foreign universities offer a range of courses and multicultural perspective which help students build a holistic mindset. Most students are able to work with their passions as they are able to choose courses of their likings. Additionally, students are able to connect with others and understand their tradition. Scholarships are important in supporting students' financial burden.

International universities appreciate students applying from diverse backgrounds. Therefore, student from tier 2 and tier 3 cities have a higher chance of acceptance than students from a metropolitan. Provided application requirement have been met universities prefer to have a multicultural perspective.

While some other popular countries where Indian students are now seeking admission include Germany, France, Singapore, and Japan, as this paper has tried to establish the top 4 popular destinations continue to be UK, USA, Canada and Australia. It will be interesting to see how this trend evolves in the future and whether more Indian students prefer to study abroad or remain in India.

Citations

Chhabra, S. *et al.* (2022) *Research opportunities in Canada, Leverage Edu*. Available at: https://leverageedu.com/blog/research-opportunities-in-canada/?utm_source=pocket_saves (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

India, P.T. of (2022) *Indians make up the highest number of Non-UK born residents in England, Wales, NDTV.com*. Available at: https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/indians-make-up-highest-number-of-non-uk-born-residents-in-england-wales-3501604?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

Bush, T. (2021) *Pestle analysis of higher education in the UK, PESTLE Analysis*. Available at: https://pestleanalysis.com/pestle-analysis-of-higher-education-in-the-uk/?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

Five reasons for the UK's growing popularity among Indian students (2022) *Hindustan Times*. Available at: https://www.hindustantimes.com/brand-post/five-reasons-for-the-uk-s-growing-popularity-among-indian-students-101642672031431.html?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

1, L.B.J. and Written by Laura Bridgestock The former editor of TopUniversities.com (no date) *How much does it cost to study in the US?, Top Universities*. Available at: https://www.topuniversities.com/student-info/student-finance/how-much-does-it-cost-study-us?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

Pros and cons of the US education system- know all pros and cons (1970) WeMakeScholars. Available at: https://www.wemakescholars.com/blog/us-education-system?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

User, S. (no date) *Fulbright Foreign Student Program, Foreign Fulbright Program - Foreign Student Program.* Available at: https://foreign.fulbrightonline.org/about/foreign-student-program?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

(No date) *5 reasons why everyone wants to study in the U.S.* Available at: <https://www.mastersportal.com/articles/839/5-reasons-why-everyone-wants-to-study-in-the-us.html> (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

Study in the US: US College and US universities (no date) Study in the US | US College and US Universities. Available at: <https://www.internationalstudentguidetotheusa.com/> (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

The top ten strengths of American higher education (2020) Texas Public Policy Foundation. Available at: https://unlockhighered.com/the-top-ten-strengths-of-american-higher-education/?utm_source=pocket_reader (Accessed: 05 June 2023).

Indians are now the largest group of foreign students in the UK (2022) The Indian Express. Available at: <https://indianexpress.com/article/education/indians-are-now-the-largest-group-of-foreign-students-in-uk-8288055/> (Accessed: 05 June 2023).