



Factors contributing to Foreign Labour Migration in Nepal: A Study in Ilam Municipality

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Article Info

Article History

Received: March 20, 2025

Reviewed: May 21, 2025

Accepted: May 30, 2025

Published: Dec 30, 2025

KEYWORDS

impact, education, foreign labor
migration, remittance

ABSTRACT

Today's globalized economy; workers are increasingly looking for job opportunities beyond their home country in search of decent work and better livelihoods. In Nepalese context, foreign labor migration is also being more important for employment mainly among unemployed people and youths who entered in labor force market. It has brought impacts on different aspects of life including education. So, this study examines the foreign labor migration and its educational impact on enrollment of students in the study area. The study followed the qualitative method of study. The study revealed that foreign employment significantly impacts the declining enrollment of students in higher education, as many opt for immediate economic opportunities abroad. Interviews highlighted that financial constraints, societal influence, and limited career prospects in Nepal are key factors driving this trend. To mitigate the decline in higher education enrollment, it is essential to create better educational and career opportunities within the country. Strengthening support systems and raising awareness about the value of higher education can help retain students in domestic institutions.

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Migration has been a significant aspect of human history, beginning thousands of years ago with early humans seeking food, better living conditions, and escaping threats, and evolving through civilizations, trade, and globalization (OHCHR, 2016). Migration involves people moving across political or geographical boundaries, often driven by economic opportunities, conflicts, environmental changes, and social or political conditions, either within or between countries (ILO, 2007). Similarly, poverty drives migration from developing countries to better-off ones, influencing foreign employment from poor to rich states and promoting migration from poor to rich states (Kharel & Kharel, 2020).

Remittance affects individual lives but has not brought about significant change in Nepal's overall economic and educational sectors (IOM, 2021). There is a significant impact of remittances on Nepal's economy, highlighting their role as a crucial source of foreign exchange, contributing to GDP, reducing poverty, and enhancing living standards (Upadhyaya, 2022). Remittance significantly impacts educational outcomes in Nepal, particularly in secondary schooling and tertiary education, with short-term importance and long-term impact foreign employment positively impacts Nepal's economy and education by providing remittances, supporting educational expenses, and stimulating economic growth, thereby enhancing household income and promoting better educational opportunities (CBS, 2021). Migrants often seek economic opportunities, education, social and family reasons, environmental factors, political instability, and health services abroad, with these factors interconnected and varying in significance depending on the region or country (NHRC, 2016).

Foreign labor migration to global countries has caused a labor shortage in rural areas, affecting agriculture and production. It has altered social structures, increased self-reliance, and caused family instability. It has created my interest in researching this topic. Seeing many

students and other individuals in this field of study heading abroad for foreign employment and enrolling in various institutions to learn language, while the number of students in campuses gradually decreased, that's why made me interested to do research on this topic.

This study of foreign migration provides insight into employment, demographic and social aspects, while data analysis for model building and scientific interpretation of internal and international migration determinants. Similarly, many studies focused on characteristic causes and consequences of migration in the different parts of the world or Nepal. Previous studies have been carried out on classical issues such as the causes and consequences of economic migration, impact of foreign employment on economic and social conditions, as well as its effects on the education sectors. However, the uniqueness of this study is its focus on the educational impact of foreign labor migration. There has been no study on how foreign employment is affecting university education. At the core of the study, it attempted to answer the questions like what the status of foreign employment is at Ilam. What factors influence students' lack of motivation towards higher education and drive their inclination towards foreign labor migration?

Education and skills acquisition significantly influence migration stages, driving it and impacting societal educational outcomes at the origin, transit, and destination (Economics of Education Review, 2009: 739–749). Education is crucial for migrant economic success, as it helps learn local languages and develop skills. However, educational infrastructure may not accommodate migrants with specific needs or cultural values. Inclusive education systems are essential for success (Sanz, 2018). The UN Secretary-General acknowledges the significance of migration in overcoming poverty, escaping conflict, and coping with economic and environmental shocks, highlighting its role in human society (UNESCO, forthcoming).

The study investigates factors driving foreign labor migration in Nepal, including poverty, lack of local employment, and better prospects abroad. It highlights the positive and negative educational impacts, including remittances.

Objective of the Study

Globally, foreign labour migration is in increasing trends and in Nepalese context it has been also a key social and economic concern at local, regional and national level therefore the specific objectives of the study are:

- a) To analyze the causes of declining enrollment of students in higher education in the study area.
- b) To identify and analyze the factors contributing to students' lack of motivation towards higher education.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant as it addresses a critical issue affecting the educational landscape and socio-economic development in Ilam. By examining the status of foreign labor migration and its impact on education, the research provides insights into why students are shifting their focus from academic pursuits to overseas employment. Understanding these dynamics is essential for policymakers, educators, and community leaders to develop strategies that encourage higher education and reduce dependency on foreign labor migration. This study will contribute to the broader discourse on education and migration, offering valuable data and recommendations for sustainable educational development in Nepal.

Research Methodology

The research adopts a qualitative approach to explore the intricate relationship between foreign labor migration and its impact on education in Ilam. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of the motivations, perceptions, and contextual factors influencing students' decisions to pursue foreign employment over higher education. The methodology

emphasizes the collection of rich, narrative data through interviews on the basis of lived experiences and perspectives of participants.

Research Design

The study employs a qualitative research approach to understand the experiences and attitudes of students, parents, and community members towards education and migration. This design is chosen because it focuses on exploring how individuals perceive and make sense of their experiences, which is crucial to understanding why students are inclined towards foreign labor migration instead of higher education.

Sampling

The study will employ purposive sampling to select participants who meet specific criteria relevant to the research objectives. A sample size of approximately three participants for interviews will be sufficient to reach data saturation and obtain comprehensive insights. In the first phase, key informants, including, social activist, and migrant household head, will be chosen based on their knowledge and direct experience with migration and its impact. This will help to establish rapport and gain comprehensive understanding of the local context.

In the second phase, the sampling will target migrant households with children enrolled in higher education. The rationale for selecting these households is to explore the influence of migration on students' educational engagement and aspirations. In-depth interviews will be conducted with selected families to gain insights into how foreign labor migration affects school enrollment, attendance, and academic performance. This targeted approach will ensure that the sample represents those directly impacted by migration-related educational outcomes in the community.

Study Area

The research will focus on migrant workers from Ilam Municipality, Ilam District, and a region known for its high rate of foreign labor migration. Ilam, located in the eastern part of

Nepal, has a diverse population and socio-economic setting, making it a suitable study area to analyze the migration trends and their impact on educational aspirations. The selection of Ilam is based on its unique educational and migration dynamics, which reflect broader national trends.

Sources of Data

The research draws data from both primary and secondary sources.

Primary Sources

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with students, parents, teachers, and community leaders. These interviews aimed to gather first-hand accounts of their views on foreign employment and its impact on education

Secondary Sources

Academic articles, government reports, and migration statistics that provide relevant background and these data will be considered secondary data.

Tools of Data Collection

To explore the impact of foreign labor migration on education, several data collection tools were employed to gather comprehensive insights from participants.

Interview Guidelines

In depth interview guidelines were carefully designed with open-ended questions. These questions allowed participants, including students, parents, teachers, and community leaders, to share detailed responses about their experiences and perspectives on foreign labor migration and its impact on education. The flexibility of the open-ended format enabled in-depth exploration of each participant's viewpoint, providing rich qualitative data for analysis.

Data Analysis Techniques and Procedures

The data analysis for this study followed a structured and systematic approach to ensure that the collected information was accurately interpreted and aligned with the research objectives. The following techniques and procedures were used:

Data Transcription

The first step in the analysis process involved transcribing the recorded interviews and focus group discussions. All audio recordings were carefully converted into written text to ensure that no details were missed. This allowed the research team to have a comprehensive, written account of each participant's responses, which could then be thoroughly analyzed. Transcriptions included both verbal responses and significant non-verbal cues where relevant, ensuring the integrity and richness of the original data.

Coding

After transcription, the data underwent a coding process. This involved reading through the transcribed text and identifying significant statements, phrases, and ideas that were relevant to the research questions. These segments of text were labeled with specific codes that captured their essence. Coding helped to break down the data into manageable parts, making it easier to find patterns and connections. The codes represented key concepts related to foreign labor migration and its educational impact.

Theme Development

Once the data was coded, similar codes were grouped together to develop overarching themes. These themes represented the central findings of the study and captured the core issues and trends that emerged from the data. By organizing the codes into broader categories, the analysis was able to highlight the most important aspects of the participants' experiences and perceptions. Theme development allowed for a deeper understanding of how migration affects education within the study area.

Interpretation

The final step in the data analysis involved interpreting the developed themes in relation to the research objectives. The research team analyzed the meaning of each theme, linking it to the literature on foreign labor migration and education. This process helped to contextualize the findings within the broader academic field, providing insights into how the study's results align with or diverge from existing knowledge. Through this interpretation, conclusions were drawn about the impact of foreign labor migration on education, contributing to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon.

The qualitative nature of the research allows for an iterative process, where themes are refined continuously as new insights emerge. This ensures a comprehensive understanding of how foreign labor migration influences educational motivation and aspirations.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The data collected through interviews with a student, a guardian, and a social activist provided valuable insights into the effects of foreign employment on the declining enrollment of students in higher education in Nepal. The analysis covered six key themes, highlighting the interconnected factors influencing students' decisions to pursue education abroad instead of enrolling in local institutions. These themes reflect economic, social, and emotional dimensions that collectively shape this trend.

The responses revealed that financial prospects and the lack of local career opportunities are among the most significant factors driving this decline. Students and families perceive foreign education as a pathway to better-paying jobs and a secure future, which are often unattainable in Nepal. Moreover, societal pressures and the prestige associated with studying abroad further reinforce this trend. The data also illustrated that the belief in the superior quality of foreign education, coupled with the challenges faced by Nepalese colleges, significantly contributes to the outflow of students.

Furthermore, emotional and psychological impacts were evident in the participants' narratives. While students expressed excitement about the opportunities abroad, they also acknowledged the emotional strain of leaving their families. Guardians similarly shared the emotional challenges of separation but viewed it as a necessary step for long-term success. This multifaceted interpretation highlights the need for systemic changes in Nepal's education system, as well as cultural and policy interventions, to address these underlying issues and encourage students to pursue higher education locally.

The analysis of this data can be further explained with the help of following six themes build on the basis of interviews.

Financial Incentives of Foreign Employment

One of the primary reasons for the decline in enrollment in higher education in Nepal is the financial allure of foreign employment. Students perceive studying abroad as a stepping stone to high-paying jobs, which they feel are unattainable in Nepal. This perception is echoed by their families, who view education abroad as a worthwhile investment. P1, a student planning to study abroad, shared, "Studying abroad is expensive, but the jobs there pay much better than in Nepal." Similarly, P2, a guardian, emphasized, "We are ready to support our child's education abroad because we believe they will earn significantly more there." Social activist P3 added, "Foreign employment has become synonymous with success in Nepal, which motivates both students and their families to prioritize it over local education." This economic rationale diminishes the appeal of Nepalese higher education institutions, which are not perceived as offering equivalent financial returns.

Perceived Quality of Education Abroad

The perception that foreign universities provide better quality education, advanced facilities, and global exposure is another key factor driving students away from local institutions. Students like P1 express this clearly: "Universities abroad provide hands-on

learning and better career opportunities." Guardians, too, criticize the outdated education system in Nepal, with P2 stating, "The education system here is outdated; that's why we prefer sending our children overseas." Social activist P3 elaborated, "This perception of quality makes local colleges less attractive to students," highlighting the competitive disadvantage faced by Nepalese institutions.

Societal Pressure and Prestige

Societal expectations and the prestige associated with foreign education also contribute significantly to this trend. Many students feel pressured to align with societal norms that equate foreign education with success. P1 mentioned, "My friends and relatives always ask about my plans to go abroad; it feels like an expectation." Guardians like P2 also recognize the social capital associated with sending their children abroad, saying, "Sending our child abroad enhances the family's social status." Social activist P3 warned, "This trend of associating foreign education with success is detrimental to local institutions," underlining the cultural factors influencing students' choices.

Lack of Career Opportunities in Nepal

The scarcity of well-paying jobs and career growth opportunities in Nepal is another driving force behind the decision to study abroad. Students are acutely aware of the challenges of finding meaningful employment locally, as P1 pointed out: "Even if I graduate here, finding a good job in Nepal is nearly impossible." Guardians like P2 echoed this concern, stating, "We don't see a future for our child in Nepal, so studying abroad is the best option." Social activist P3 added, "The brain drain is a direct result of unemployment and underemployment in Nepal." This lack of local opportunities not only pushes students abroad but also undermines the sustainability of Nepal's higher education system.

Less faith in Local Colleges

The increasing trend of students opting for foreign education has led to a noticeable decline in the enrollment rates of local colleges, threatening their viability. P1 observed, "Many of my classmates are applying to colleges abroad instead of enrolling locally." Guardians like P2 highlighted the competitive disadvantage faced by Nepalese colleges, saying, "Local colleges are struggling because many students are leaving Nepal." Social activist P3 added, "This decline in enrollment weakens our education system and local workforce," emphasizing the broader societal implications of this trend.

Psychological and Emotional Impact on Families

While families may financially and socially support foreign education, the emotional toll of separation and the potential challenges of isolation abroad are significant concerns. P1 acknowledged this conflict, sharing, "I'm excited about going abroad, but I know I'll miss my family a lot." Similarly, P2 expressed the emotional strain on parents, saying, "It's hard for us emotionally, but we want a better future for our child." Social activist P3 pointed out, "The emotional strain on families often goes unnoticed amid the economic aspirations," suggesting that the psychological impact on both students and their families deserves more attention in this discourse.

Results

The study highlighted financial prospects and limited local career opportunities as primary factors affecting / contributing to the decline in enrollment in higher education in Nepal. Many students perceive foreign education as a gateway to better-paying jobs, which are often scarce in Nepal. Families also view foreign education as a strategic investment for long-term financial stability. This economic appeal makes local institutions less attractive, as they are not seen as providing comparable opportunities for career advancement or financial returns.

Societal pressures and the prestige associated with foreign education further exacerbate the issue. Students often feel compelled to study abroad due to societal expectations, while

families see it as a way to enhance their social status. Additionally, there is a widespread belief that foreign universities offer superior education, better facilities, and global exposure compared to Nepalese colleges, which struggle with outdated infrastructure and teaching methods. These perceptions contribute to the decreasing enrollment rates in local institutions, undermining their sustainability and relevance.

The study also revealed the emotional and psychological challenges associated with this trend. Students often experience mixed emotions, feeling excited about new opportunities abroad but anxious about leaving their families. Families face emotional strain due to separation but justify it as a necessary sacrifice for a better future. Furthermore, the declining enrollment in local colleges weakens Nepal's education system and workforce development. Addressing this issue requires improving the quality of higher education in Nepal, creating better local job opportunities, and promoting a cultural shift that values domestic education as a viable and prestigious choice.

Conclusions

The effects of foreign employment on declining enrollment of students in higher education in Nepal are deeply interconnected with financial, social, and systemic factors. The promise of higher salaries and better living standards abroad motivates many students to prioritize foreign education over local institutions. This perception is reinforced by families who see foreign employment as a long-term investment and a means to elevate their socio-economic status. However, this trend undermines the appeal of Nepalese colleges, leaving them struggling to compete with the perceived advantages of studying abroad.

Additionally, societal pressures and the prestige associated with foreign education have created a cultural norm where pursuing higher studies overseas is viewed as a hallmark of success. Combined with limited career opportunities and an outdated education system in Nepal, this has led to a growing brain drain, with students and their families opting for

international pathways. The resulting decline in enrollment at local colleges weakens Nepal's higher education infrastructure and limits the nation's ability to retain skilled professionals.

The psychological and emotional toll of this trend cannot be overlooked. While families may prioritize economic and social benefits, the separation caused by studying and working abroad introduces significant emotional strain. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach: improving the quality of Nepalese higher education, creating more local job opportunities, and fostering a cultural shift that values domestic education. Without such interventions, the cycle of declining enrollment and brain drain will persist, further weakening Nepal's socio-economic fabric.

Recommendations

Based on the major findings, several recommendations can be made to address the issues identified. Educational institutions should develop strategic measures to retain students at the higher education level by addressing factors that drive them toward foreign employment. Institutions and policymakers must create a supportive academic environment by offering quality education, scholarship programs, and career-oriented opportunities within the country. Guardians and educators should collaborate to emphasize the long-term benefits of higher education over immediate financial gains from foreign employment. Furthermore, awareness campaigns involving social activists and stakeholders should be initiated to highlight the potential drawbacks of relying solely on foreign employment. By fostering a culture that values higher education and providing adequate resources, stakeholders can contribute significantly to reducing student attrition at the tertiary level.

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