GLOBAL TALENT MOBILITY AND KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY: INDIAN STUDENTS IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR KERALA'S KNOWLEDGE ECONOMY

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Abstract

The worldwide tendency toward a knowledge-based economy, and the need to produce graduates in large numbers with high skills, has led to a higher demand of these graduates, which has led to movement of students across borders. The United Kingdom is the most desired destination among the Indian students based on the excellent universities in the country, with focus on research, and employment opportunities in the post-graduate levels. The study will explore the perceptions of Indian students in four of the top UK universities (University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, University College London and University of Northampton) of the UK knowledge economy. The current study is performed as an empirical survey (n=100) whereby 25 respondents are selected in each of the universities.

Keywords:- Knowledge Economy, International Student Mobility, United Kingdom Higher Education, Post-Study Work Opportunities

Earning money is a primary motivator for all international students. The contemporary worldwide economy is becoming more and more focused on knowledge as a source of economic and development and innovation as well as competitiveness. The foundation of this knowledge economy is availability of highly trained human capital that can create process and apply knowledge to create value in industries and allied sectors. In this case, higher education institutions (HEIs) assume the centre stage as they produce graduates with better technical expertise, critical thinking skills, and research skills.

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Student flow to key foreign institutions is an essential channel of growth not only to individual career development but also to national human stock and the creation of global knowledge base, which has long been a prime destination among other factors due to its highly competitive education system, high concentration of research centers, and highly structured post-study work opportunities. Indian students constitute some of the highest number of international students in UK due to their academic excellence, greater exposure to the global research environment and career advancement opportunities.

Besides schooling, the experiences of Indian students in UK institutions are indicative of their participation in knowledge creation, innovation and cross-cultural professional networks, which eventually leads to the global knowledge economy. In spite of these opportunities, Indian students are confronted with numerous challenges such as expensive tuition and living expenses, visa and immigration issues as well as cultural adaptation. The global economy of the 21st century is a knowledge-based economy, not a manufacturing-based one, and the productivity and growth are driven by intangible resources, which include ideas, skills and innovation. Universities are house of essential research, teaching, and innovation organizations, and they are the valuable providers of skilled human capital to the national knowledge economies. The United Kingdom boasts of considerable international higher education **(British Council, 2024** *Indian Student Mobility to the UK: Trends and Economic Contributions.* London: British Council).

1.1 Statement of the Problem

Human capital is a valuable resource in the modern day global economy, which is highly skilled, a driver of innovation, competitiveness, as well as socio-economic development. (**Source: Daily Telegraph, UK**).The Indian students especially keralites are participating actively in the knowledge economy in their academic careers pursuit. The growing interest that the Indian students have in postgraduate and PhD education in the United Kingdom is due to the presence of the best universities in the world. In addition, high tuition fees, cost of living, uncertainty on the visa, difficulty in social integration, restricted number of work hours may also hinder the full utilization of the knowledge ecosystem in the United Kingdom by the Indian students. The constraints do not just have an impact on individual academic and career performance, but also on whether the knowledge can be transferred in the long-run back to India and Kerala, which is increasingly relying on returning graduates in order to develop its knowledge and human capital systems. The proposed study will fill the knowledge gap of the Indian students in their participation in research and industrial activities. Therefore, the current study seeks to analyze the role of Indian students in the UK knowledge economy by examining their motivations, engagement patterns, challenges, and post-study trajectories, with a special focus on gender and academic level differences.

1.2 Scope of the Study

This paper will explore the experiences of Indian students from Kerala in the leading universities of the UK (Oxford, Cambridge, UCL, and Northampton) in order to comprehend their motivations, participation and intent on their studies upon concluding their studies in terms of research, innovation and industry relation. It brings in knowledge gaps regarding gender and master/doctoral student differences in research participation and career orientation. The study will be done in 2024-2025; it will examine academic mobility and exchange of knowledge between the UK and Kerala, and this will be used in policy and institutional planning to ensure that international student mobility can be optimized to its fullest potential.

1.3 Objectives of the Study

1. To evaluate the role of Strategic University Partnerships and the Contemporary relevance Kerala's Knowledge Economy.
2. To investigate the motivation levels that make Indian students choose to study in the reputed universities in the UK.
3. To assess the extent and the participation of Indian students in industry placements, research and innovation.
4. To find out the barriers and challenges that make it hard to get involved in the knowledge economy of the UK.
5. To explore post-study objectives of the students and how they affected the transfer of knowledge between UK and India.

1.4 Hypotheses

H01: Between male and female students there is a significant difference in motivation levels.

H02: Master and doctoral students have a significant difference in engagement level.

H03: The more actively engaged students in research/industry are the more solid intentions they have to stay in the UK after the studies.

H04: Post study intentions vary significantly between male and female students.

1.5 Limitations of the Study

Although this study provides valuable information on the involvement of Indian students with the UK knowledge sector, a number of limitations would need to be overcome. There were 100 respondents in the study who worked in four leading universities in the UK (Oxford, Cambridge, University College London, and University of Northampton). Whereas this offers increased specifies, the sample could not be entirely representative to the rest of the Indian students in other UK universities or to the other disciplines.

2. Review of Literature

The literature review contextualizes this research in the wider discourse of knowledge economy, international student mobility and bilateral knowledge flows.

Altbach and Knight (2007) argue that the market and intellectual reasoning are

the two driving forces of the internationalisation of information flows and students are the agents of internationalisation of information flows. Their participation gives prominence to the dual role played by overseas students as both learners and developers of new systems.

Khadria (2011) notes that the migration of Indian students is one of the most important aspects of the global knowledge economy, as it increases the intellectual capital of the host countries and increases the threat of brain drain in the case of an imbalanced process of migration, unless the migration process is complemented by the knowledge circulation processes in India.

King and Raghuram (2019) have investigated the issue of international student migration within the sociological framework, stating that such factors as academic excellence do not contribute to the process, but the aspects of career mobility, culture, and migration policy do.

Verbik and Lasanowski (2007) also wrote about the contribution of the UK universities to international education, referring to the competitiveness of the country in relation to research findings and industrial connections.

Maringe and Gibbs (2009) examined the decision-making process of international students and they found that the most significant driving forces were institutional reputation, career and scholarship prospects.

Shah and Nair (2016) found out that foreign students are contributing significantly to the innovation system of host countries, especially in the form of research collaboration and entrepreneurship.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

In this research, the descriptive-analytical approach will be used to integrate quantitative and qualitative designs. The quantitative element involves the use of structured questionnaire and the qualitative element involves semi-structured interviews involving 12 respondents to provide the contextual depth.

3.2 Data Source

A structured questionnaire was used to obtain data on motivation factors (5-point Likert scale) and research/ innovation/industry engagement (5-point composite scale). Both primary and secondary data are used for the current study. The Secondary data were collected from the Academic admission statistics from the respective university site. By 2025 the research study would be conducted in the course of six months, between January and June of that year and involved the collection and preliminary analysis of data. Primary data were gathered during this period through surveys of 100 Indian students in four major UK universities, which include the University of Oxford, University of Cambridge, University College London and the University of Northampton and semi-structured interviews of 100 respondents chosen.

3.3 Sampling Methods & Analytical Tools

The research population will include Indian students pursuing masters and PhD at four major universities. Purposive

sampling techniques was used for the present study The results represent expose the experiences of students who tend to become more engaged in research and innovation, which overestimates their overall contribution to the knowledge economy. Both Quantative and Qualitative approach is adopted for the current study.

4. Analysis and Interpretation

With the help of both quantitative survey data and qualitative data that are received in the process of semi-structured interviews, the research creates an in-depth understanding of the experience and worldview of the respondents. Data analysis is in line with the research objectives.

Objective 1: Role of Strategic University Partnerships and the Contemporary Knowledge Economy

The knowledge economy in Kerala is growing by the day as students who graduate in the best universities in the United Kingdom and subsequently come back to home. These graduates will also come with the latest research capabilities, international industry practices, multi-cultural practices, all of which will boost the critical industries like information technology, engineering, healthcare and education. Out of their foreign experience, they also help to enhance the innovation ecosystem in Kerala by importing fresh research practices, as well as cooperative and entrepreneurial attitudes. Empirical evidence is used to validate such positive returns in the present context. According to a report of LinkedIn Talent Insights, highlight more than 1,600 professionals have been relocating since the last 5 years out of the UK alone to Kerala with the rest of the Gulf and wider diaspora bringing talent back in areas such as IT, healthcare, education and entrepreneurship. Kerala government has introduced a variety of programs, including Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission (KKEM) that has tried to train 30 lakh, generate 20 lakh jobs, and match the skills development with industry-relevant standards (AI/ML, cloud computing, cyber security etc. (**Source: The Times of India**) Such developments demonstrate the way of feeding back of graduates who returned to policy

Table 1

Sample Distribution (n = 100)

University	Male	Female	Master's	PhD	Total
University of Oxford	15	10	13	12	25
University of Cambridge	14	11	12	13	25
University College London	13	12	18	7	25
University of Northampton	13	12	17	8	25
Total	**55**	**45**	**60**	**40**	**100**

Source: Primary Data

objectives and state activity. A Study on Indian Students in United Kingdom Higher Education Institutions does indicate the need and the platforms to enable such returns to thrive. The present-day higher education environment experiences a range of issues the increased tuition costs in the UK, the changing immigration policies, the lack of international partnerships of Indian universities, and the growing demand of the leading talent **(House of Commons Library, 2023; British Council, 2024).** It is with this background that, on this note, co-operative alliances are not merely opportune but also warrant rather than mere necessities in the current context. In this backdrop, the present studies highlight the following Contemporary role of Strategic University Partnerships and the Contemporary Knowledge Economy with the perspectives of previous case studies.

1. Strengthening Research and Innovation: Collaborative research agreements can address gaps in Kerala's knowledge economy while leveraging the expertise of UK universities. Doctoral-level students, as highlighted in the study, demonstrate higher engagement in research innovation, industry collaborations with Joint initiatives in AI, healthcare innovation, renewable energy, and digital technologies can lead to co-authored publications, patent development, and international joint projects. Moreover, exposure to UK research methodologies can enhance the quality of Indian research outputs. Current issues like limited R&D funding in Indian institutions can be mitigated by tapping into UK university networks and funding opportunities (Shah & Nair, 2016; Wadhwa, 2020).

2. Improving Educational and Professional Access: Dual degree programs, faculty exchange, and short-term training programs can offer international exposure to the students in Kerala and help close the skills gaps in fields such as IT, data analytics, and entrepreneurship (Maringe and Gibbs, 2009). Since female Indian students are more motivated about the best UK universities, it is possible to adjust the program to make it gender-sensitive in mentorship and career advice to overcome such challenges as financial limitations and uncertainty about visas (King and Raghuram, 2019). This exposure also enhances human capital of the state, and makes the students apt to leadership positions in the global knowledge economy.

3. Encouraging Entrepreneurship and Exchange of Knowledge: The returnees who studied in UK institutions not only have critical cross-cultural skills, but also an entrepreneurial mindset, which can be helpful to the startup ecosystem in Kerala and the overall ability to generate innovations. Examples of partnerships would be incubators, entrepreneurship mentorship programmes, and research commercialization. Kerala Knowledge Economy Mission (KKEM) is aiming at 20 lakh jobs and up skilling projects in AI, cloud computing and cyber security. These achievements can be improved through partnerships with universities in the United Kingdom, where there will be applied best practices in generation and commercialization of knowledge

internationally (British Council, 2024; Times of India, 2023).

4. Overcoming Policy barriers and mobility barriers: Current problems, including restrictive post-study work policies, uneven visa policies and increased cost of living in the UK, are influencing student engagement and retention (House of Commons Library, 2023). These problems can be alleviated by creating innovative university partnerships by co-designing scholarships, internships, and pre-planned work-study opportunities.

5. Sustainable Knowledge Exchange: There should be knowledge exchange between India and UK (Source: Migration and Mobility Partnership www.gov.uk) Indian students also provide the UK knowledge economy by participating in research and collaborating with industries and graduates send back to India give Kerala a boost in terms of innovation and entrepreneurship (Khadria, 2011; Marginson, 2019). Systemic partnerships guarantee persistence, and there is a lesser chance of unilateral brain drain and sustainable bilateral knowledge sharing.

Objective 2: Motivations for Choosing UK Universities *(Based on Five-Point Likert Scale Responses, n = 100)*

Hypothesis H1: *There is a significant difference in motivation levels between male and female students.*

Interpretation:

H1 - Accepted. The gender-based difference in motivation is large; females are more motivated to study in the UK. There is a minor difference in the percentage of motivation among female respondents in all items (mean gap ≈ 4 – 5 %).

Objective 3: Engagement with Research, Innovation and Industry

Hypothesis H2: *There is a significant difference in engagement levels between Master's and Doctoral students.*

Interpretation:

H2 - Accepted. There is a major distinction; the doctoral students are more in research, innovation, and industry affiliation. Doctoral respondents show consistently higher engagement (average

Table 2

Factors of Motivation

Factor of Motivation	Female Agree	Male Agree	Overall Agree
International visibility of UK universities	92%	88%	90%
Research and innovation exposure	86%	82%	84%
Career and employability opportunities	90%	85%	87%
Scholarship accessibility	72%	65%	68%

Source: Primary Data

Table 3

Engagement Levels

Area of Research	Master's Agree	Doctoral Agree	Gap
Research projects participation	68%	92%	24%
Industry placements / internships	61%	78%	17%
Entrepreneurship activities	54%	72%	18%

Source: Primary Data

≈ 81 per cent) compared to Master's students (average ≈ 61 per cent).

Objective 4: Barriers and Challenges in the knowledge economy of the UK.

Hypothesis H3*: Students with higher research/industry engagement have stronger intentions to remain in the UK post-study***.**

Interpretation:

H3 - Accepted. There is a positive relationship between more engagement and intention to stay in the UK on completion of study.

Objective 5: Post-Study Intentions and Gender Differences

Hypothesis H4:*Post-study intentions vary significantly between male and female students.*

Interpretation

H4 has been accepted. The post-study plans differ greatly between genders.

Male respondents are more likely to desire to stay in the UK for the short term, whilst female respondents prefer return or partnership arrangements.

Table 4

Barriers and Challenges

Constraint Item	Strongly Agree + Agree	Neutral	Disagree + Strongly Disagree
Expensive tuition and living expenses	83%	9%	8%
Visa/work-hour prohibitions	78%	12%	10%
Lack of social integration difficulty	69%	18%	13%
Poor institutional support	72%	15%	13%

Source: Primary Data

Table 5

Post-Study Intentions

Intention Statement	Female Agree	Male Agree	Difference
Seek post-study employment in UK	58%	70%	12%
Return to India for career opportunities	57%	48%	9%
Collaborate UK with Kerala after return	81%	79%	2%

Source: Primary Data

Overall Interpretation

More than 70 per cent of participants expressed positive perceptions across all dimensions of the UK-India knowledge corridor. High tuition fees and visa uncertainty remain the major deterrents. The acceptance of all four hypotheses underscores the existence of meaningful gender- and level-based variations, confirming that motivation, engagement and mobility decisions are inter-linked in shaping global talent flow.

5. Findings, Suggestions and Conclusion

5.1 Findings

1. The research found out that the main driving factor of Indian students to be at the UK universities is the international academic prestige of the university, quality of research facilities and improved employment opportunities. Girls demonstrated more motivation rates in comparison to boys, which can be attributed to the fact that females view the overseas education as a means of professional empowerment and worldwide identification.
2. Doctoral programs increased the engagement and this proved the increased involvement of doctoral students in research and industry work. The interdisciplinary projects improved the analytical and entrepreneur skills. The UK ecosystem exposure developed the competencies applicable in the knowledge economy of Kerala.
3. Students encounter financial, visa and fund problems, yet they are still encouraged to work/research in the UK. Engagement is associated with institutional support / policy flexibility.
4. Female students preferred to continue their stay in the UK to conduct research/work, but some male students preferred to start their careers in India to become entrepreneurs/academicians. Global knowledge skill and innovativeness Returnees increase the knowledge based corridor of economy in Kerala.

5.2 Suggestions

1. Gender-sensitive scholarship and mentorship programmes should be designed in the UK universities to provide equal access to academic opportunities.
2. An advertising campaign of Indian and UK institutions together will create awareness in research based courses and career avenues that are innovation driven.
3. There should be increased guidance in enhancing pre-departure counselling and financial aid provision to eliminate information gaps in potential students of Kerala and other Indian.
4. The institutions of higher learning in Kerala can form clusters of research returns to use the skills of its alumni, and encourage local innovation hubs to collaborate on start-ups.
5. Bilateral funding schemes might be discussed by the Indian policy makers in research and innovation projects: Indian and UK institutions might jointly carry out research and innovation.
6. Encourage cross-national ways of knowledge sharing between Indian alumni in foreign countries and local academic and business connections, which will enhance the presence of Kerala in world innovation chains.

5.3 Conclusion

In today's world, strategic collaborations between Kerala and UK institutions are critical for maximising the benefits of international education, research, and human capital mobility. By addressing hurdles such as financial stress, visa uncertainty, and limited institutional exposure, these collaborations can improve research participation, global employability, and innovation results. Gender-sensitive programs and post-study assistance help to guarantee inclusion, while matched policies between the two nations boost the knowledge sector and bilateral knowledge flows. The Indian higher education system is dealing with sporadic research funding, limited worldwide linkages, and ongoing difficulties in reintegrating returnee scholars. Addressing such similar concerns necessitates coordinated policy solutions. More targeted scholarship and financial aid, the establishment of secure and transparent immigration corridors, and the development of formalized industrial internships will strengthen the UK's capacity to recruit and retain international talent. For India, proactive returnee reintegration measures, joint research projects, and assistance for graduating returnees may transform outward mobility into a two-way knowledge flow. Such programs not only limit the likelihood of a one-way "brain drain," but also help to construct a robust UK-India knowledge corridor, with one supporting innovation and economic growth in each nation and the other facilitating cultural interchange in either. It is evident in the current study that Indian students pursuing their studies in the top UK universities are playing the role of driving forces in the global knowledge economy and at the same time, shaping the knowledge development system in Kerala.

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