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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Between Hope and Reality: Migration Aspirations and Barriers to Overseas Education among Students at the University of Rajshahi

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Abstract

This study focuses on the obstacles facing students from abroad who are studying at the University of Rajshahi, Bangladesh, along with the links between aspirations and preparedness to migrate. A quantitative cross-sectional research design was used to gather data on 200 undergraduate and postgraduate students using a structured questionnaire. Migration intention, awareness, motives, readiness and barriers perceived by the students were analyzed using descriptive statistical analysis. The results show that most respondents were very interested in studying or migrating abroad, mainly because of higher education, job opportunities and better living standards. But a very small percentage had made any real efforts to apply to universities overseas or to migration schemes. The most prominent challenges to international mobility were financial costs, lack of information and guidance, and lack of institutional support, as well as visa-related challenges. The research also shows that there are significant differences between the aspirations of students to migrate and their willingness to explore international options. The study showcases how the motivations are not the only drivers of migration outcomes, but also resources, information and institutional support. The study extends the literature by moving beyond migration intentions to focus on the impact of structural constraints on the migration readiness of students in the context of a public university in Bangladesh.

Keywords: International migration, Student mobility, Migration aspirations, Migration barriers, Higher education

Introduction

International student mobility has increasingly become a central element of today's globalization, linking to higher education, labor markets and opportunities across the globe. Studying abroad is an opportunity for many students that can lead to academic growth, professional development and better social and economic opportunities. With the growing global competition for jobs, especially those that require skills and education, students from developing countries are turning to international mobility opportunities to fulfill their personal and professional interests. This has become very strong in Bangladesh, as the number of university students seeking to study abroad for higher education and employment is increasing (Mahmud, 2023; Uddin et al., 2025).

Several factors influence the increasing trend of Bangladeshi students going abroad for studies, such as educational, economic and social reasons. Poor employment prospects and worries about the quality and competitiveness of domestic higher education, as well as dreams of global exposure, can push students to explore options of studying and migrating abroad (Hossain et al., 2025; Zaman et al., 2023). Meanwhile, those looking for higher education abroad have access to international qualifications and advanced research and learning opportunities, as well as to a wider range of career opportunities, making international education

a lure for many students. This has led to an increased role of migration as a component in the educational and career choice-making process of a significant number of the university-going population in Bangladesh.

International migration is still out of reach for many students, even in the face of these emerging hopes. Previous studies have revealed several obstacles, such as financial restrictions, insufficient information, language barriers, institutional issues, and visa regulations (Bayat et al., 2025; Makhroja et al., 2025; Oliinyk, 2024). These barriers indicate that students' decision to pursue international opportunities is driven by both motivational and ability factors, including the availability of resources and support. As a result, there can be a significant gap between migrants' intentions and their ability to migrate.

While the motivations of migration, push-pull factors, and the experiences of international students have been studied previously, little attention has been paid to understanding the link between migration aspirations and migration preparedness among prospective student migrants at Bangladeshi public universities. Most of the literature available has been centered around the motives for migration, and the lack of literature on the inability of many students who wish to study abroad to make a move is the gap that this article aims to address. Moreover, there has been little research that has focused on the interaction of financial, informational, institutional and policy barriers in affecting students' migration capabilities and readiness for international mobility.

The purpose of this study is to answer these gaps by examining the obstacles that hinder the international migration of the students of the University of Rajshahi. In addition to analyzing students' intentions to study overseas, the study investigates how ready students are to take up international opportunities and the factors that enable or inhibit this. The study's contribution to the existing literature is in three ways, which are influenced by the Push-Pull Theory and Aspiration-Capability Framework. First, it goes beyond considering aspirations to migrate to investigating the mismatch between aspiration and readiness. Second, on the one hand, it offers empirical evidence of how structural, institutional and informational barriers influence students' migration capacities in a Bangladeshi public university environment, and on the other hand, it highlights how these barriers are conceptualized in the context of the public university in Bangladesh. Third, it points to the importance of universities and policymakers in minimizing mobility disparities and improving access to international education opportunities. In these contributions, the study aims to move the discussion on student migration from the level of motivation to a broader perspective of what conditions facilitate and/or hinder international mobility.

Methodology

Research design

The study employed a quantitative cross-sectional design to look into the barriers to international migration of the students of the University of Rajshahi. The design aimed to reflect students' migration aspirations and willingness to travel internationally, as well as their perceived constraints, at one specific moment. A carefully designed survey technique was used to gather similar information from students with various academic backgrounds.

Study area

This study was carried out at the University of Rajshahi, one of the biggest public universities of Bangladesh, in the north-west of the country. The university is diverse in terms of social and educational backgrounds and thus is appropriate for analyzing migration intentions. The relevance of the site as a research arena is further reinforced by the fact that the area is undergoing a growing interest by the Bangladeshi youth in studying and working in other countries.

Sampling and participants

The study comprised undergraduate and postgraduate students from various faculties. The respondents were selected using a purposive sampling technique, which ensured that the interviewers could get information from them that was relevant to their understanding of intention to migrate internationally. 200 students (Arts, Science, Social Science, Business Studies, Engineering and others) participated in the survey. This provided both diversity of academic and social views.

Data collection instrument

A structured questionnaire comprising three sections was used to gather the data. The questionnaire items were developed based on existing literature on student migration and were reviewed for clarity and relevance before administration.

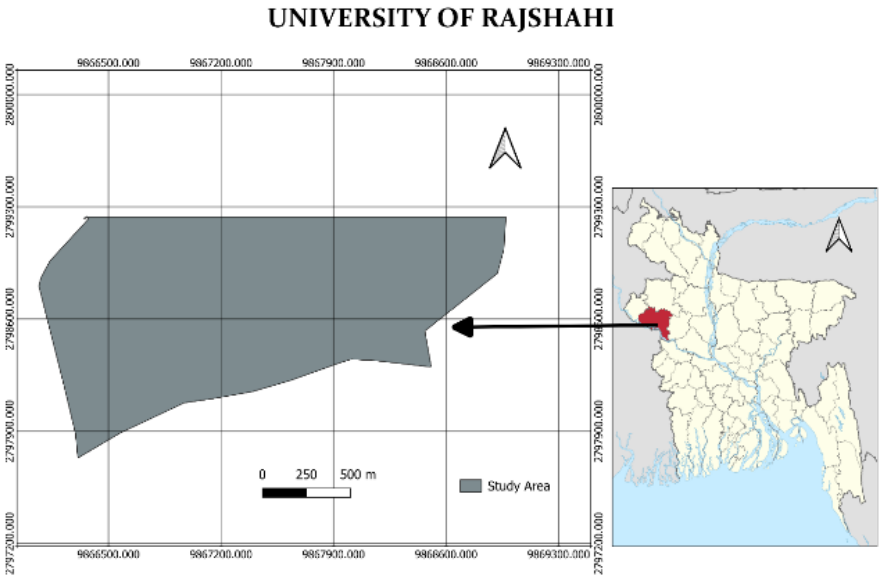


Figure 1 Study area map showing the location of University of Rajshahi, Rajshahi, Bangladesh.
Source: Prepared by authors using QGIS and OpenStreetMap data (2025).

Data collection procedure

Data was taken from 14 October to 30 November 2025. The majority of the responses were collected in the preliminary stages of data collection. It was conducted on campus as a survey, with voluntary participation. All respondents were told about the study and that they could withdraw at any time.

Data analysis

The data were coded and analyzed with the Microsoft Excel software. Demographic characteristics, migration aspirations and perceived barriers were summarized by descriptive statistics (frequencies and percentages), as well as preparedness levels. The results were analyzed through Push-Pull Theory and the Aspiration-Capability Framework to gain insight into the interplay between motivations and constraints in determining migration plans.

Ethical considerations

Ethical principles were observed during the study. The study was anonymous, self-reported and self-selected. The anonymity of the respondents was maintained and no identifying details were taken. Every data was used only for academic purposes and confidentiality was ensured in data handling, analysis and reporting.

Literature review

International migration has emerged as a key element of globalization and it influences educational opportunity, labour mobility and socioeconomic development in countries. Migration in Bangladesh started to be seen as a way to find better economic opportunities, and recently, international education has gained popularity among the young and university students as well (Mahmud, 2023; Uddin et al., 2025). The rising trend in students going abroad signals the global shift in higher education, where international qualifications, global exposure and access to competitive labour markets are considered as key avenues for social and economic progress (Ahmed, 2025).

Education and employment opportunities have been identified as major factors influencing student

migration in the past. The findings from the studies on educational aspirations of Bangladeshi students have found that the desire to get better education, international recognition, better employment opportunity and better standard of living has a significant influence on the desire to move abroad (Adhikari, 2025; Hossain et al., 2025; Zaman et al., 2023). Likewise, Bulyk (2024) claims that students are now considering international mobility as a strategic move for future opportunities and not just a learning experience. The results are in line with the opportunity differentials between countries of origin and destination, which is a core theme of migration scholarship (Lee, 1966; Wadood et al., 2023). But while the literature has been successful in understanding the motivations for moving, it has not been as useful in explaining the reasons why many aspiring migrants do not make it to the actual process of migration.

Reinterpretation of the motives of migration has come under challenge recently, as a result of the questionings of recent scholarship. The authors show that intentions to migrate are a dynamic as well as gradual process that is influenced by both educational experiences and future expectations as well as opportunities (Kondakci et al., 2026). Similarly, Aktar et al., (2025) report that the desire of young people in Bangladesh to migrate is still on the rise despite ongoing economic and institutional challenges. This implies that push and pull factors cannot be the only factors for understanding the decision to migrate. Instead, migration outcomes are linked to people's level of resources and opportunities to act on their aspirations.

One of the most common challenges identified when discussing impediments to international student mobility is financial barriers. The high expenses of studying in another country such as tuition, living costs, visa fees, and additional costs, are important factors in international students' decision not to pursue their studies abroad (Bayati et al., 2025). The financial constraints are also a significant problem in Bangladesh as well, where many university students are facing financial difficulties (Alam et al., 2025). In addition, research in the University of Rajshahi shows that students' learning is often determined by their social and economic inequalities that impact access to opportunity and resources (Alam et al., 2025). These findings indicate that aspirations to migrate could be common, but so is the potential to make those aspirations a reality.

Institutional and informational barriers have become significant factors in migration. Makhroja et al. (2025) stress the need for migration infrastructure, such as counselling, institutional support, and the availability of credible information. Likewise, Usman et al., (2025) demonstrate that the key support mechanisms of countries of origin, the availability of information, and institutional structures play a significant role in shaping migration decisions and experiences. These research findings suggest that migration is a contingent choice, rather than a natural choice, and depends on the institution in which it takes place, which conditions the availability of information and opportunities.

There are also some studies that have drawn attention to the social, cultural, and psychological aspects of migration. Students have often been found to have difficulties with language, social integration, cultural adaptation, emotional issues, and other concerns (Atiba et al., 2025). Among Bangladeshi students, these issues are expressed in conversations about homesickness, cultural adjustment, and the struggles of adjusting to new academic and social settings (Mariam, 2023; Munim & Mahmud, 2024). Moreover, Asher and Roof (2025) show that other factors affect the international students' experiences beyond economic issues, as gender differences can greatly affect their academic and social adjustment experiences.

International mobility is also influenced by institutional and policy settings. Oliinyk (2024) notes that visa policies, administrative conditions and governing bodies can enable or disable migrants' opportunities. This indicates that factors other than the individual motivation, such as larger regulatory frameworks, also shape migration outcomes. These observations reflect the Aspiration-Capability perspective of Carling (2002) and the more recent Aspiration-Capability perspective of Carling and Collins (2017), which states that individuals are only likely to migrate when they can also move. In this way, migration barriers manifest when aspirations outpace resources, opportunities and institutional support.

While there has been increasing scholarship on the phenomenon of student migration, there are a number of gaps. Previous research has concentrated on

intentions to migrate, push-pull factors, or the experiences of students who have migrated to foreign countries. In comparison, limited effort has been invested in studying the interplay of aspirations, preparedness and structural constraints among potential student migrants in the Bangladeshi public universities. In addition, although the existing literature highlights different categories of barriers, such as financial, informational, institutional and policy-related, relatively few studies address how all these barriers may influence students' readiness for international mobility. Such a constraint is especially prominent in the context of Bangladesh, as empirical studies about the relationship between migration intentions and migration capacities are still quite limited.

To fill this gap, the present research considers the problems faced by the foreign students of the University of Rajshahi. The study advances the understanding of the aspiration-capability gap in student migration by examining the factors shaping migration aspirations and preparedness, institutional support, perceived barriers, and policy constraints simultaneously, thereby offering a more nuanced explanation of the migration process beyond the push-pull dichotomy. It does this, however, by offering empirical evidence for a context in a Bangladeshi public university and provides insights into how universities and policymakers can improve access for their students to international educational opportunities.

Theoretical framework

Push-Pull theory of migration

Push-Pull Theory is still one of the most popular theories used to explain the decision to move. The theory was initially introduced by Lee (1966), who suggested that migration is determined by both the negative aspects of the home country (push factors) and the positive aspects of the host country (pull factors). The extent of educational opportunity and access, political unrest, poor living conditions, and economic insecurity can be considered push factors, while economic opportunity, higher wages, improved quality of life and greater career opportunities can be considered pull factors.

The theory, more specifically, is highly relevant to the present investigation because it is able to explain the phenomenon of strong intentions of university students of Rajshahi to go abroad for education and migration. The push and pull factors include: perceived constraints in domestic higher education institutions and employment markets; perceived quality of education, international exposure, and employment markets. But Push-Pull Theory is more useful in explaining the aspirations with respect to migration than in explaining the non-migration of those who aspire to migrate.

Aspiration-capability framework

In recent years, scholars have turned to the 'Aspiration-Capability Framework' (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017) which expands upon the shortcomings of the traditional theories. This approach emphasizes the role of intersection of migration desire and migration capacity in determining the outcome of migration. Migration aspiration is the desire or intention to migrate, while migration capability is the resources, opportunities and means by which an individual could act on their desire or intention.

Migration is thought of as not happening because people want to move, from this viewpoint. Instead, it is economic resources, educational qualifications, social networks, information, institutional support and policy conditions that make it possible for successful migration. Consequently, people can have high intentions to migrate but not be able to do so due to the lack of capabilities. This is what Carling (2002) calls "involuntary immobility": people would like to migrate but are not able to do so due to structural factors would like to migrate but are not able to.

Analytical framework of the study

This study proposes the combination of Push-Pull theory with the Aspiration-Capability framework to interpret the motivations or aspirations of international migration of the students of the University of Rajshahi. Push-Pull Theory is employed to explain why students might be interested in migration, such as for educational, economic and social reasons. The Aspiration-Capability Framework complements this approach by elaborating on why migration intentions do not necessarily lead to actual migration.

The study makes the assumption that students have different aspirations to migrate as a result of the constraints they encounter at home and opportunities

they perceive in the international arena. The actualization of these aspirations, however, relies on the capacities of the migrants and the environment, such as the availability of financial means, information, institutions, languages, and migration policies. Hence, the aspiration-capability gap between students and their readiness to migrate could be considered as an aspiration-capability gap created by structural and institutional inequalities. The study uses these two theories together for a holistic view to understand the obstacles to international migration of university students in Bangladesh.

Results and discussion

Gender distribution

As shown in Figure 2, male respondents constituted 58% of the sample, while female respondents accounted for 42%. Although male students were slightly overrepresented, the participation of a substantial proportion of female respondents ensured that both genders were adequately represented in the study. This distribution provides a broader understanding of students' perceptions regarding international migration and overseas study opportunities. Previous studies have suggested that gender can influence migration aspirations, access to resources, and perceptions of mobility opportunities (Usman et al., 2025; Asher & Roof, 2025). Therefore, the inclusion of both male and female respondents enhances the comprehensiveness of the findings and allows for a more balanced assessment of migration-related attitudes among University of Rajshahi students.

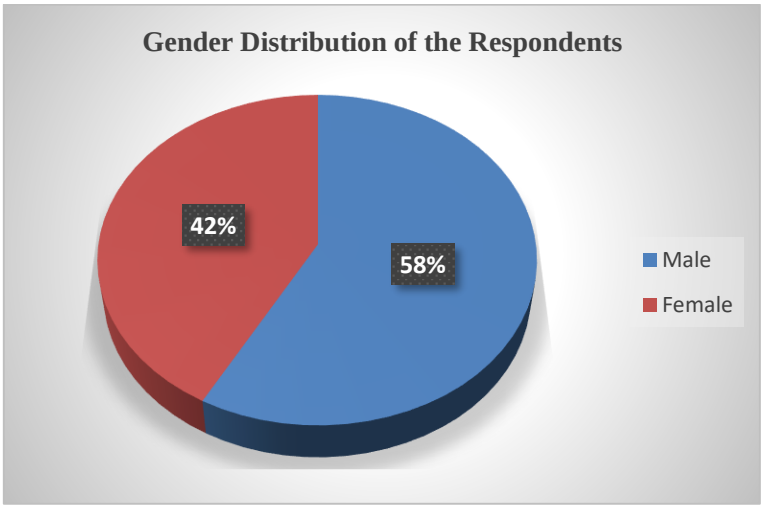


Figure 2 Gender distribution of respondents
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

Faculty/Department

Figure 3 shows the distribution of respondents among different faculties of the University of Rajshahi. The study sample consisted of students from various disciplines such as Social Science, Science, Arts, Business Studies and Engineering, indicating a multidisciplinary survey sample. Students from a variety of academic backgrounds are better represented in the study, adding a wider range of perspectives and offering a fuller picture of what students want to do in their migration and what they perceive as obstacles.

Students' academic interests and future aspirations for careers and international opportunities may be affected. Research has also indicated that students' aspirations for academic advancement, skill building, and employment opportunities can be linked to their desire for migration (Adhikari, 2025; Hossain et al., 2025). The view of opportunities for overseas education and migration that students have from different faculties may be different depending on the type of training they receive and their future career trajectories. The range of the sample contributes to a robust study by providing a broader spectrum of experience and perspectives on

international mobility among University of Rajshahi students.

The slightly higher percentage of Social Science students may be because they are interested in social and international matters, but it is not claimed that there is a causal link between the academic subjects and aspirations for migration.

The authors do not perform the comparative analysis with faculty members in the present study, but the involvement of students in various disciplines gives a broader picture of migration aspirations and barriers at the university level and contributes to the overall relevance of the findings of the present study.

Year of study

The respondents were students in their first year of study (55%), second year (30%), third year (12%), fourth year (2%) and Master's (1%), as shown in Figure 4. This distribution suggests that the results are related more to the perceptions and aspirations of students at the beginning of their university studies. Past research indicates that students' motivations to migrate change over time as they become more familiar with academic opportunities abroad and increase their exposure to migration (Adhikari, 2025; Kondakci et al., 2026). Thus, the high number of migrants with migration aspirations as reported in this study might well be aspirations rather than plans. The results should also be taken with a pinch of salt due to the small sample of senior and postgraduate students. Migration preparedness and application behavior could vary by academic level.

Interest in overseas study and migration

There was a significant proportion of respondents (65%) who wished to study or migrate to another country abroad, 22% of respondents were unsure and 13% reported that they had no intention of studying or moving abroad. The present results show that the University of Rajshahi has a high interest in having its students travel internationally. Based on Push- Pull Theory, this interest can stem from the perceived benefits of studying overseas, such as obtaining better career prospects and living standards, as well as from constraints in the domestic educational and employment system (Wadood et al., 2023; Zaman et al., 2023).

The results may be analyzed using the Aspiration-Capability Framework developed by Carling (2002) and Carling and Collins (2017), which contrasts aspiration to capability for migration. The high rate of students saying they wanted to migrate indicates that migration is an important future goal. As subsequent findings show, however, relatively few students have made any tangible efforts toward migration; that is, strong aspirations are not necessarily followed by tangible migration. This reflects that there is an aspiration-capability gap, meaning that students would like to access opportunities abroad, but there may be barriers stopping them from doing so.

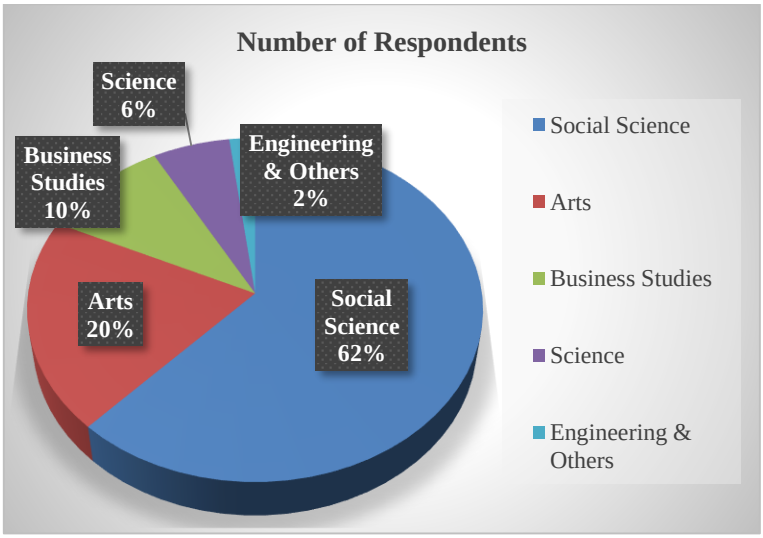


Figure 3 Faculty/Department distribution of respondents

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

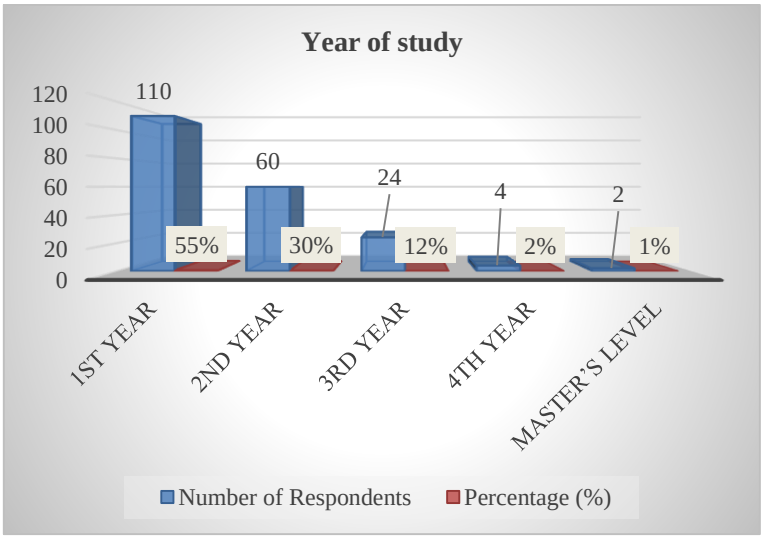


Figure 4 Distribution of respondents by year of study.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

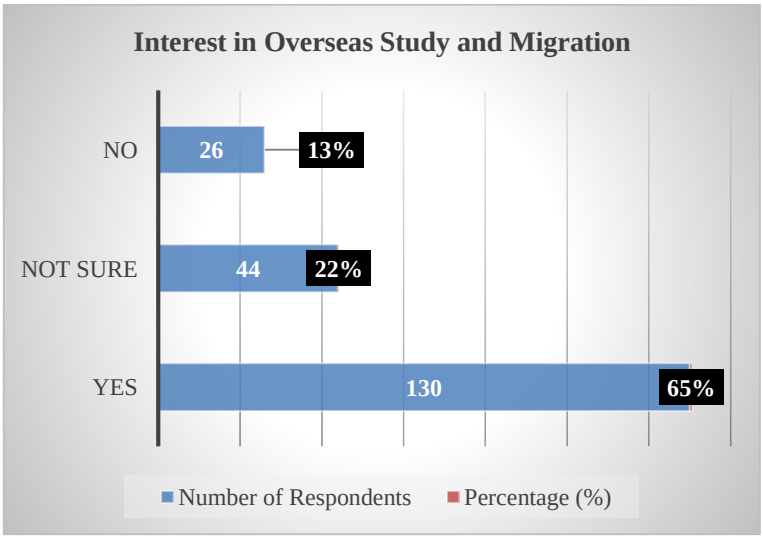


Figure 5 Students' interest in overseas study and migration
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

Awareness of the process of studying or migrating abroad

Figure 6 reveals that 44% of the respondents felt a little bit aware about the process of studying or migrating overseas and 33% respondents felt that they were not well aware of the process. By comparison, 18% said they were very well informed and 5% said they had no information about all. The results indicate that there is a general knowledge of migration opportunities abroad among students, but there is not much knowledge about the procedures of applying for a visa, the required documents, scholarships or admission procedures.

Access to information is considered to be an important migration capability from the perspective of the Aspiration-Capability Framework (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017). It is observed that students have high aspirations to undertake study or migration abroad; however, they lack knowledge about the migration procedures, which can limit their ability to make their dream a reality. Thus, the results suggest that informational barriers are a major obstacle to the

mobility of students. The findings are in line with previous studies, which have highlighted the need for guidance, information accessibility and institutional support to promote international migration opportunities (Makhroja et al., 2025; Usman et al., 2025). Enabling better access to relevant and credible information related to migration could therefore play a role in narrowing the divide between the aspirations and the readiness of students to move internationally.

Primary motivation for going abroad:

Most of the respondents (60%) said they studied abroad to get higher education, followed by better job opportunities (22%), improved living standards (13%) and social prestige or other (5%). (See Figure 7) These results show that academic progress continues to be the main motivator for international mobility aspirations amongst students at the University of Rajshahi.

In light of the Push Pull theory, the results show that the pull factors for the foreign destinations are significant. Quality education, internationally recognized qualifications, and better career prospects seem to encourage the students to take opportunities abroad (Wadood et al., 2023; Zaman et al., 2023). The salience of higher education as a motivating factor suggests that students see international education as a means to professional development and socioeconomic mobility. In other respects, the focus on employment and the betterment of living standards signifies the significance of economic factors in influencing migration aspirations. The results align with past research, which has found that educational and career prospects are significant factors that affect student migration choices in the context of developing countries (Adhikari, 2025; Hossain et al., 2025).

Major barriers faced by students in pursuing studies or migrating abroad

Financial constraints were found to be the biggest constraint to study or migrate abroad (38%), followed by not getting proper information and guidance (36%), as seen in Figure 8. Other considerations, such as visa and immigration restrictions (10%), family pressure or emotional attachment (8%), language and cultural barriers (4%) and other reasons (4%), were reported less frequently. The results indicate that economic and informational limitations are the main barriers to students' international mobility.

The Aspiration-Capability Framework (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017) helps to understand that migration is related not only to aspirations but also to resources and opportunities available to them. Lots of students would like to study or move to another country, but for reasons of money and information, they are not able to migrate. The results also show that, as reported by previous studies (Alam et al., 2025; Hossain et al., 2025), structural barriers are the primary impediment for the international mobility of students, not a lack of aspiration.

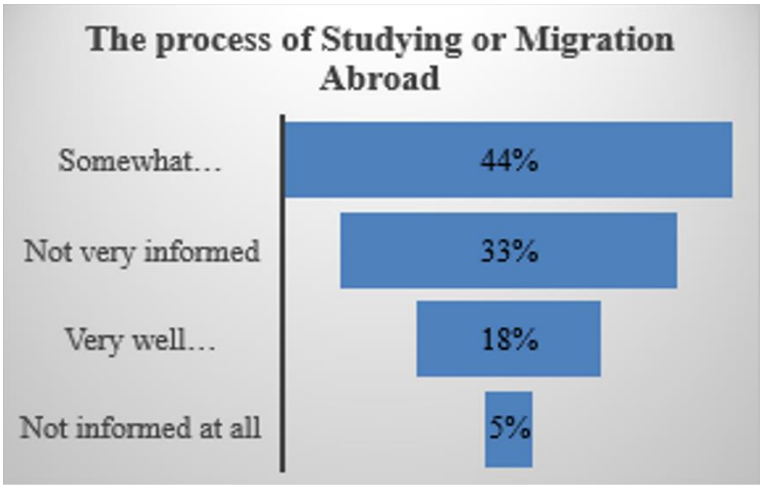


Figure 6 Awareness of the process of studying or migrating abroad.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

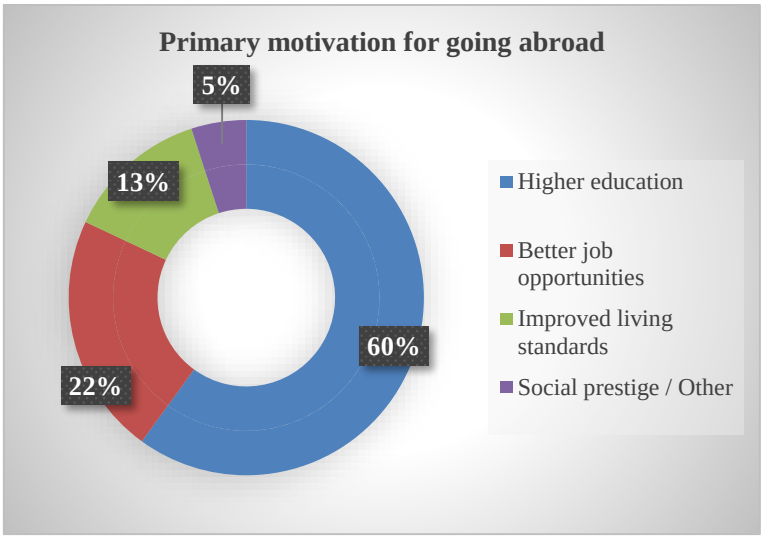


Figure 7 Primary motivation for studying and migration abroad.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

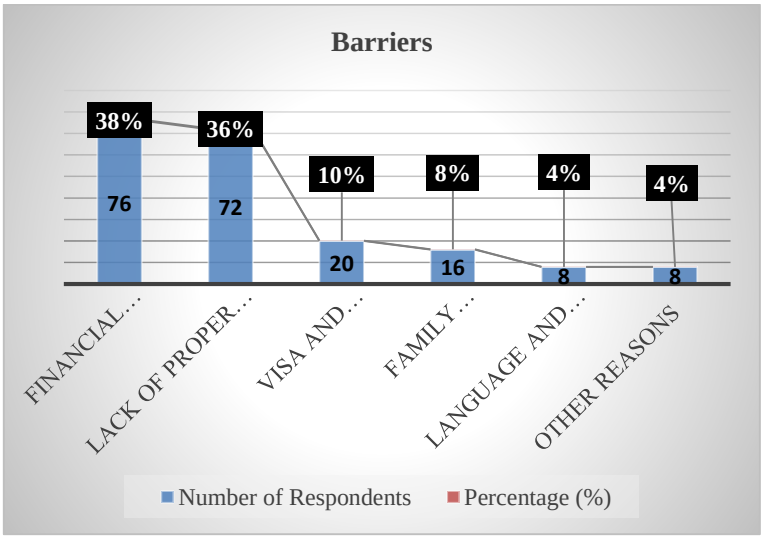


Figure 8 Major barriers to international migration.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

Student intentions and preparedness for applying to foreign universities: trends and percentages

Most of the respondents (63%) indicated their interest in studying abroad, but did not submit any applications yet, as shown in Figure 9. Another 18% intended to apply in the near future and just 8% had already applied to foreign universities or visa programs. Conversely, 11% said they would do nothing. The results show that there is a significant disconnect between students' dreams of migration and their readiness to take advantage of international opportunities.

The results overall corroborate the Aspiration-Capability Framework (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017) that claims that intentions to migrate do not inevitably lead to migration. A considerable percentage of the population wants to study abroad but only a small number has made tangible steps towards realizing this objective. The difference indicates that financial problems, lack of information and institutional hurdles may limit students' abilities to migrate.

Consequently, these findings indicate a gap between aspiration and capability, and that there is a lack of resources and opportunities to support people' s aspirations for international mobility.

University support and resources for international study and migration at the University of Rajshahi:

As illustrated in the Figure 10, 42% of the respondents felt the university has adequate support for international study and migration, and 28% were not sure about the support that is offered. In addition, 18% felt that the support was inadequate and 12% found it only somewhat adequate. The results indicate that some students are aware of institutional support, while others are not. The results also showed that a significant number of students are unaware of or dissatisfied with the support that is available to them.

Institutional support is an important migration capability within the Aspiration-Capability Framework (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017) which helps access international opportunities. Relatively high uncertainty among respondents could be a lack of communication, guidance and awareness about services available. The results obtained support the findings of other researchers (Makhroja et al., 2025; Usman et al., 2025) which is strengthening the institutional guidance and information services would increase students' preparedness for international study and migration.

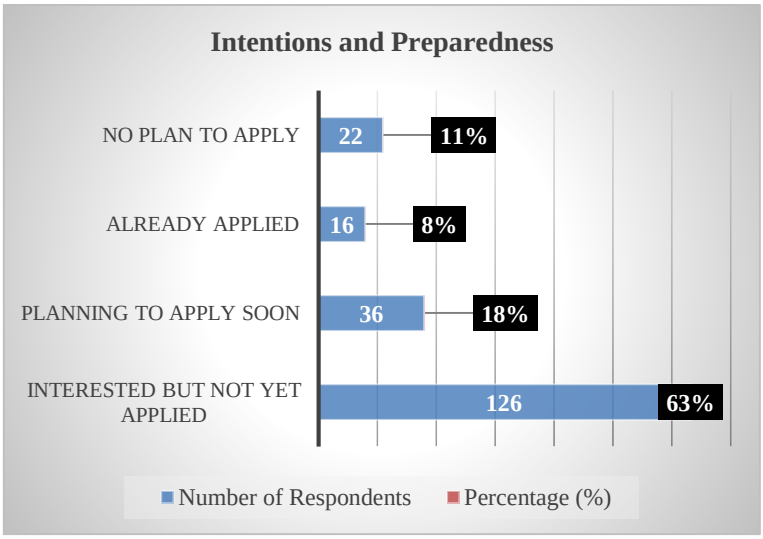


Figure 9 Students' intentions and preparedness for applying to foreign universities.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

Impact of government policies and visa regulations on students' migration abroad

More than half of those (52%) saw government policies and visa regulations as very difficult barriers to international migration, and 35% as somewhat difficult, as presented in Figure 11. A much smaller proportion (9%) found these regulations to be not very difficult and 4% reported no difficulty. Overall, approximately 87% of respondents experienced some degree of challenge related to policy and visa requirements.

Visa restrictions and migration policies are important structural factors according to the Aspiration-Capability Framework (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017) as they shape migration capabilities. When students have a strong intent and suitable preparation, restrictive procedures and doubts in relation to the policy may be seen as an obstacle to accessing international opportunities. The results align with earlier studies on the significance of institutional and policy restrictions on migration results (Oliinyk, 2024). Thus, students' mobility between universities at international level is still a major hurdle due to the policy restrictions.

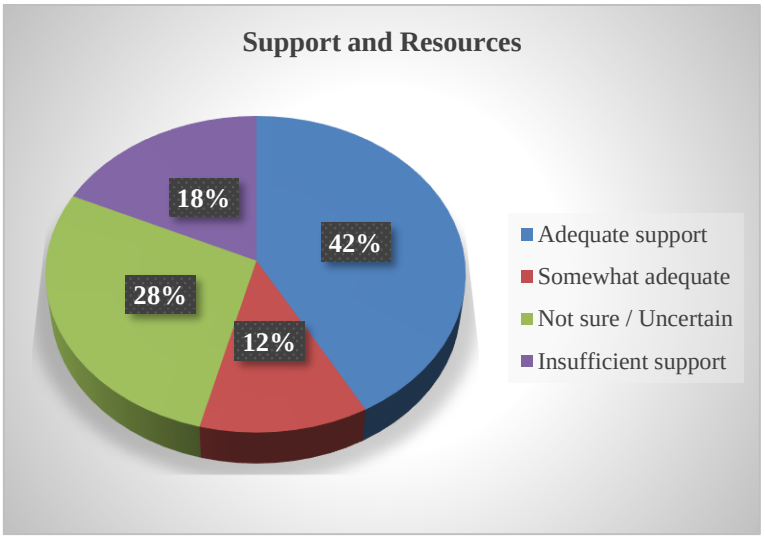


Figure 10 Perceptions of university support and resources for international study and migration.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

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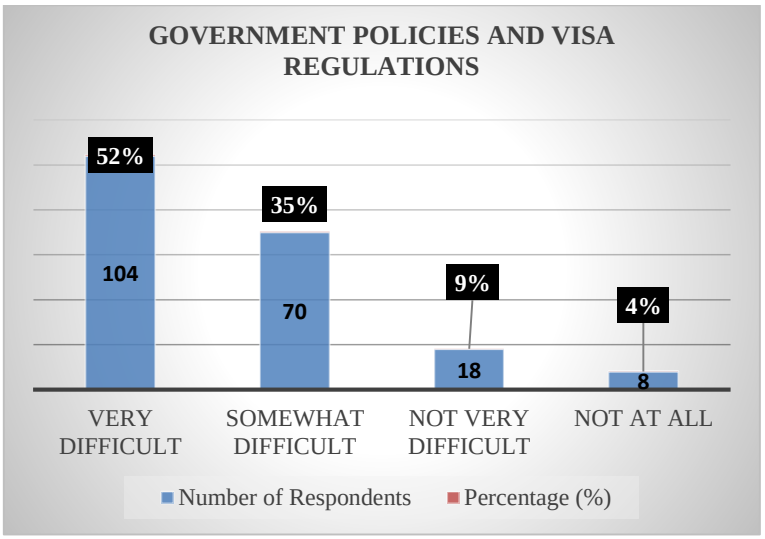


Figure 11 Perceived impact of government policies and visa regulations on international migration.
Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

Students' hopes and concerns regarding international migration

Table 1 reveals that students at the University of Rajshahi have high aspirations for migration, but also have several concerns about its feasibility. Proper guidance, counseling and mentorship programs (66%) and language training courses (55%), including IELTS/ TOEFL preparation courses, were the most common needs identified. In addition, 42 percent of respondents felt workshops on application-related skills, such as writing a Statement of Purpose (SOP), writing recommendation letters, and preparing for standardized tests, were needed. The results suggest that students consider the availability of information as well as preparation to be important factors for successful international mobility.

In regard to aspirations, 30% of respondents linked international migration with the opportunity to pursue quality education, to be exposed to the world, and to better their career prospects. These expectations are indicative of the highly desirable characteristics that draw students to higher education abroad and to migration. But 25% of respondents did share concerns about cultural adjustment, homesickness, and financial challenges, which is a reflection of some of the uncertainties surrounding migration. Other points made by students included the need for alumni connections outside the country (18%), the need for partnerships with foreign universities via exchange or joint programs (15%) and financial aid and scholarships (10%).

These findings corroborate the Aspiration-Capability Framework (Carling, 2002; Carling & Collins, 2017), which posits that migration outcomes are a function of both aspirations and capabilities needed to attain such aspirations. Students show a keen interest in international opportunities but identify the importance of institutional support, language skills, funds and professional advice. Hence the reinforcement of these support mechanisms can improve the preparation of students to a large extent and decrease the mismatch between migration intentions and opportunities for mobility.

Table 1 Students' perceived support needs, hopes and concerns regarding international migration.

Support / Resource Needed	Number of Respondents	Percentage (%)
Proper guidance, counseling centers, and mentorship programs	136	66%
Language training (IELTS/TOEFL, functional English)	110	55%
Workshops/seminars on SOP, recommendation letters.	84	42%
Hopes: quality education, global exposure, better career	60	30%
Fears: cultural adjustment, homesickness, financial challenges	50	25%
Strong alumni network abroad for guidance and mentorship	36	18%
Collaboration with foreign universities (exchange/joint programs)	30	15%
Financial aid and scholarships	20	10%

Source: Prepared by the authors based on the questionnaire survey (2025).

Conclusion

This study endeavored to explore the obstacles to international migration among the students of the University of Rajshahi and the link between the aspiration of migration and preparedness for migration. The results show that while a large proportion of the students were keen to study at foreign universities or to participate in overseas migration programs, relatively few had taken any concrete steps towards applying to the foreign universities or migration programs. Financial resources, lack of information and guidance, low level of institutional support and visa challenges were identified as the major constraints of students' international mobility.

The study combines Push- Pull Theory and the Aspiration- Capability Framework, showing that the attractiveness of opportunities in a host country is not the only factor shaping migration decisions, but the resources and support available to students to avail of the opportunities as well. The results indicate a clear

aspiration- capability gap, with high aspirations to migrate held against structural/ institutional limitations. The study also adds to the existing body of evidence on student migration in Bangladesh, as it brings empirical evidence from the context of public university and demonstrates how unequal access to migration-related resources affects the outcomes of migration.

Results are of significance for universities and policy makers. In the university environment, there should be special units for international students that offer career counseling, migration advice, mentoring, language classes and scholarship application, Statement of Purpose (SOP) writing and visa counseling sessions. Expanding the students' access to international opportunities could be achieved through strengthening partnerships with foreign universities through exchange programs and academic collaboration. Policy level, the government should expand scholarship opportunities, put in place more education loans and financial support, streamline administrative procedures, and provide a central platform of information that would provide reliable information about going overseas and pathways for migration.

The study concludes that the barriers to international mobility need to be overcome, and that for this it is important to go beyond the promotion of the desire to migrate. To provide students with equal access to information, financial resources, institutional support, and international networks is key to make their dreams come true in relation to their education and professional life. This analysis could be replicated in other universities in Bangladesh, and migration intentions and capacity could be examined as they change over time in various socio-economic and institutional settings.

Limitations

There are some limitations to the study. First, there is the limitation of purposive sampling at one public university which means that the findings cannot be generalized. Secondly, the cross- sectional design measures migration intentions at a single moment in time and is unable to evaluate shifts in attitudes and readiness over time. Third, self-reported responses may have response bias. Comparative and longitudinal designs which are carried out across various institutions should be used in future research.

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Conflict of Interests

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Declaration of generative AI in scientific writing

The study employed the use of generative artificial intelligence (AI), namely, ChatGPT free version (GPT-5.3), only to refine language and provide the academic structure, as well as enhance the readability and coherence of written materials. The AI-assisted contents were carefully verified and checked to be accurate, original and adhering to the academic ethics.

CRediT author statement

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