

Dreaming beyond home: Factors shaping Bangladeshi women's aspirations for overseas higher education

Nishat Tabassum^{1*}, Faria Mubashira²

¹ Pabna University of Science and Technology, Pabna, Bangladesh

² University of Dhaka, Dhaka, Bangladesh

Article Information	Abstract:
Submitted: 2026-01-9 Revised: 2026-03-16 Published: 2026-05-28	The increasing number of Bangladeshi female students pursuing higher education abroad reflects persistent domestic challenges, including limited educational quality, restricted research opportunities, political instability, and unequal access to global academic resources. This study aims to analyze the factors influencing Bangladeshi female students' decisions to pursue higher education abroad and to examine how institutional and family contexts shape their aspirations for international study. A quantitative cross-sectional survey was conducted involving 200 female students from two public universities in Bangladesh. Data was collected via questionnaires using convenience sampling and analyzed descriptively in SPSS. The findings reveal two principal results. First, Bangladeshi female students' aspirations are driven by the interaction of push factors, including political instability, perceived low-quality education, and limited research opportunities, and pull factors, such as the international reputation of foreign universities, opportunities for self-development, independence, and family support. Second, institutional and family contexts shape these aspirations differently. Students at Pabna University of Science and Technology receive stronger family and institutional support, whereas students at the University of Dhaka experience greater family resistance while exhibiting stronger aspirations for independence and greater sensitivity to political instability. The study concludes that overseas education is perceived not merely as a response to domestic constraints but as a strategy for educational mobility, women's empowerment, and social advancement. The findings contribute to the development of a contextual gender-institutional perspective on educational migration and provide practical implications for universities, families, and policymakers in strengthening support systems that expand female students' access to international higher education.

Keywords:

Higher Education;
Female; Bangladesh,
Aspiration; Push; Pull.



Copyright: © The author (s) 2026

This is an open access article under the terms and conditions of the [Creative Commons AttributionNon-Commercial 4.0 International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/).

To cite this article (APA Style):

Tabassum, N., & Mubashira, F. (2026). Dreaming beyond home: Factors shaping Bangladeshi women's aspirations for overseas higher education. *An-Nisa' Journal of Gender Studies*, 19(1), 1-16. <https://doi.org/10.35719/an-nisa.v19i1.424>

*Corresponding author: Nishat Tabassum, Department of Public Administration, Pabna University of Science and Technology, Pabna, Bangladesh e-mail: nishat@pust.ac.bd

INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of international education has become a significant trend in higher education, driven by globalization and the proliferation of online media (Trelfa et al., 2024; King & Sondhi, 2018). Despite this trend, female students in Bangladesh encounter socio-cultural barriers that restrict their mobility, and research on their aspirations remains limited. This lack of access perpetuates gender inequality in international education. While globalization increases demand for cross-border education, social norms in developing countries such as Bangladesh often constrain women's mobility. According to UNESCO (2024), more than six million international students are recorded globally, with the majority originating from Asia. Fakunle (2021) identifies push factors, including educational quality and employment opportunities. In the Bangladeshi context, Khatun et al. (2024) found that graduates place a high value on foreign degrees, and Alamgir (2023) reported a threefold increase in the number of students studying abroad over the past 15 years. BANBEIS (2023) documents rising female participation in higher education; however, their aspirations to study abroad remain insufficiently explored. This gap in the literature on Bangladeshi female students' aspirations for international study constitutes a critical research need.

Extensive research has examined student migration for higher education, typically categorizing it into three primary streams. First, the motivations of South Asian students to migrate are shaped by factors such as educational quality, university reputation, career prospects, economic stability, and aspirations for social mobility and professional advancement (Tamang & Shrestha, 2021; Kharel, 2022; Aryal et al., 2024; Granato et al., 2024). Second, social and familial networks reinforce aspirations to study abroad, while gender dynamics influence students' career orientations, concerns for personal safety, and international educational mobility (Mulvaney, 2017; Kölbel, 2020; Skariah & Sivarenjini, 2024; Kabir, 2021; Rajan et al., 2024). Third, Bangladeshi student migration is shaped by push-pull factors, including weak governance, political instability, educational limitations, and the appeal of high-quality education and global opportunities (Zaman et al., 2024; Rashid, 2024; Baral et al., 2024; Rahim, 2025). Despite this body of research, a notable gap remains regarding the aspirations of female students in Bangladesh. This study addresses this gap by investigating their motivations and the distinctive socio-cultural and economic factors that influence their decision to pursue education abroad.

The objective of this study is to identify and analyze the factors influencing Bangladeshi female students' decisions to pursue higher education abroad, thereby contributing to the broader discourse on gender, education, and international mobility in Bangladesh. The research aims to inform reforms in institutional support systems and policy frameworks. The study addresses the following research questions: (1) What are the primary motivations for Bangladeshi female students to study abroad? (2) In what ways do cultural and social norms shape their aspirations? Theoretically, this research advances the literature on gender, educational mobility, and push-pull migration theory as it pertains to Bangladeshi female students. Practically, the findings provide a foundation for developing higher education policies, enhancing institutional support, and formulating university strategies to improve access, equity, and preparedness for overseas study among female students.

This study contends that Bangladeshi female students' decisions to pursue higher education abroad are primarily shaped by systemic pressures in their home country, rather than solely by the appeal of global education. The data demonstrate that the principal push factors are structural, encompassing limited educational opportunities, social constraints, economic

challenges, political instability, and highly competitive admissions processes. In contrast, pull factors such as high-quality education, diverse academic programs, international prestige of degrees, career prospects, and supportive environments serve as catalysts rather than fundamental causes. Consequently, the international aspirations of Bangladeshi female students can be understood as a rational response to the domestic system's failure to provide equitable and secure access to higher education. This analysis underscores the necessity for policies that address both outward mobility and the underlying structural inequalities within Bangladesh.

METHOD

Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative cross-sectional design, measuring dependent and independent variables at one point in time (Pérez-Guerrero et al., 2024; Connolly et al., 2024). This approach helps describe the population and answer two main research questions: what motivates female students in Bangladesh to study abroad, and how cultural and social norms affect their aspirations? The cross-sectional design was chosen because it provides a snapshot of aspirations at a single point in time, allowing identification of links between socio-cultural factors and the decision to study abroad. This method allows the researcher to measure both internal motivations, such as career goals and educational quality, and external pressures, such as gender norms and family expectations, that influence female students' aspirations.

Data Collection

Data were collected from both primary and secondary sources to support the identification of key motivations and the influence of cultural and social norms (Kelly et al., 2024; Cascini et al., 2024). Primary data were obtained through a structured questionnaire administered to 200 female students from the University of Dhaka (DU) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST), specifically exploring personal reasons (e.g., career, global access) and socio-cultural barriers (e.g., stigma, family permission). Secondary data were derived from journal articles, news reports, and websites to enrich the context regarding gender dynamics in Bangladesh and international education trends. This combination ensures that findings on motivations and the influence of norms are not merely descriptive but also grounded in contextual evidence.

Sampling and Distribution

A non-probability convenience sampling method was used because of limited access (Ahmed, 2024). The survey was shared through student groups, email, and social media. While this sample is not statistically representative, it successfully reached female students who are active online and have internet access, which matches the group interested in studying abroad. The two research questions can still be meaningfully answered.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 20 to examine main motivations, such as how many students mentioned educational quality or career opportunities, and to examine the impact of cultural and social norms, including barriers from family or society. The results are shown in tables, bar charts, and pie charts to make the distribution of responses clear. De Pilli et al. (2024) note that this kind of descriptive analysis helps researchers see main patterns, such as whether internal motivations are stronger than outside social pressures. Showing the data visually helps

readers understand the complex aspirations of Bangladeshi female students in a clear and organized way.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Result

Demographic and socioeconomic characteristics of respondents

The overview of the research respondents' profile reveals variations in characteristics based on university affiliation, age, educational level, and economic status. The composition of participants demonstrates a diverse distribution across respondent groups, thereby providing a clearer understanding of the research sample's background. These data are important for systematically describing the demographic context to support further analysis.

Table 1

Demographic and Socioeconomic Characteristics of Respondents

University	Frequency	Percent (%)
University of Dhaka	100	50.0
Pabna University of Science and Technology	100	50.0
Total	200	100.0
Age	Frequency	Percent (%)
18-20	10	5.0
21-23	117	58.5
24-26	73	36.5
Total	200	100.0
Educational Level	Frequency	Percent (%)
Honors 1 st Year	10	5.0
Honors 2 nd Year	43	21.5
Honors 3 rd Year	45	22.5
Honors 4 th Year	59	29.5
Masters	43	21.5
Total	200	100.0

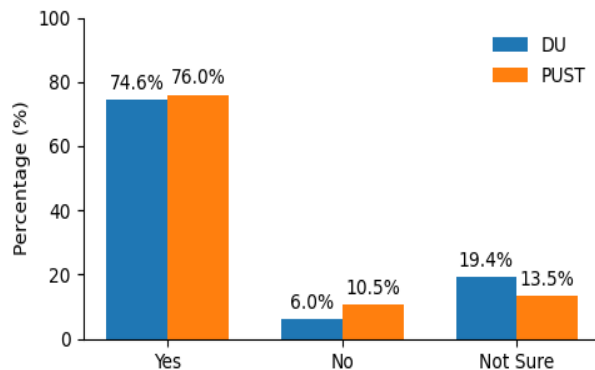
Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Table 1 summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 200 female student respondents, with equal representation from the University of Dhaka and Pabna University of Science and Technology. The majority of participants were aged 21–23 years (58.5%), followed by those aged 24–26 years (36.5%), and 18–20 years (5.0%). Fourth-year undergraduates comprised the largest academic group (29.5%), followed by third-year undergraduates (22.5%) and second-year undergraduates (21.5%). Additionally, 21.5% of respondents were enrolled in master's programs, and 5.0% were first-year undergraduates.

Willingness, perceived reputation, and choice of study programs abroad

The perceptions of female students regarding the quality and study programs offered by foreign universities were examined. Data was collected to describe respondents' views on various aspects of international education, including institutional reputation, academic quality, and the influence of external conditions. An understanding of these perceptions is essential to provide a more in-depth explanation of the dynamics of study-abroad aspirations among female students in Bangladesh.

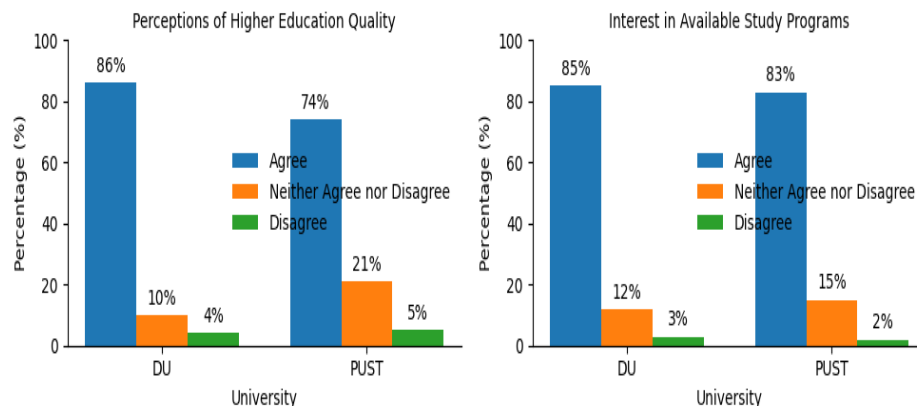
Figure 1
Intention to Pursue Higher Education Abroad



Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 1 shows that students from the University of Dhaka (74.60%) and Pabna University of Science and Technology (76.00%) demonstrate very strong aspirations to pursue higher education abroad, indicating a widespread trend. The slightly higher interest among PUST students may be attributed to more limited local opportunities; however, PUST students also show a higher rejection rate (10.50%) than DU students (6.00%), suggesting the presence of constraints, such as financial barriers. In contrast, DU students exhibit a higher level of indecision (19.4% versus 13.5%), reflecting more careful consideration due to greater exposure to information. The institutional context appears to influence students' confidence and perceptions of opportunities to study abroad.

Figure 2
Female Students' Perceptions of the Quality and Study Programs at Foreign Universities



Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 2 demonstrates that three primary factors influence Bangladeshi female students' decisions to pursue studies abroad: the reputation of international universities, perceptions of local education quality, and political instability. University reputation emerges as the most influential factor, with 90% of PUST students and 81% of DU students identifying it as significant, suggesting that global academic standing is a central consideration. The greater agreement among PUST students may reflect their view of foreign degrees as pathways to social mobility and career advancement. Dissatisfaction with the quality of education in Bangladesh is also notable, with 65% of PUST students and 53% of DU students expressing concern. Political instability is

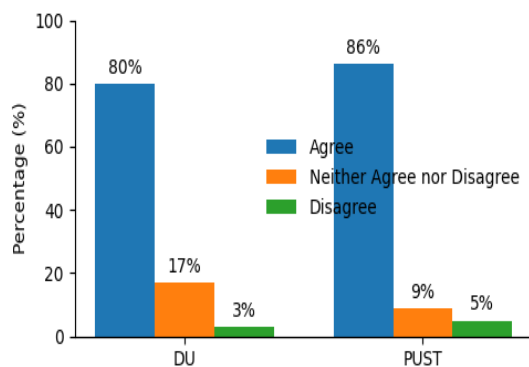
another significant motivator, cited by 85% of DU students and 78% of PUST students, as it prompts the search for a more stable learning environment. Collectively, these academic, professional, and socio-political factors drive the study-abroad aspirations of Bangladeshi female students.

Self-development motivation and limited research opportunities

The motivation of Bangladeshi female students to pursue studies abroad is not solely academic; it also encompasses aspects of personal development and independence. In addition, perceptions of limited research opportunities within the country also shape their aspirations. These two factors reflect both internal and external drivers that need to be understood in context, given differences in access and experience across higher education institutions in Bangladesh.

Figure 3

Self-development and Independence as the Main Reasons for Studying Abroad



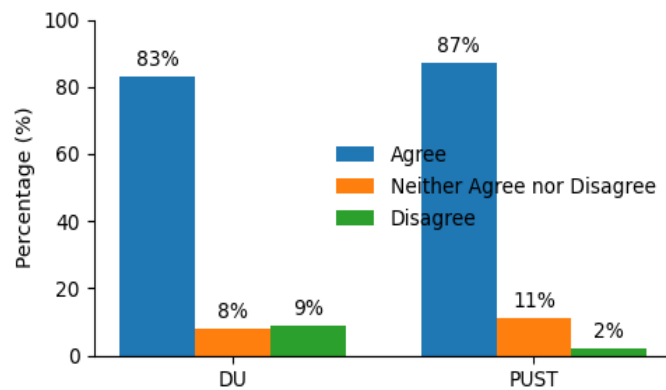
Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 3 indicates that both female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) (80%) and at Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) (86%) strongly agree that personal development and independence are the primary reasons for studying abroad. PUST students demonstrate slightly higher agreement, suggesting a greater aspiration to leave their local environment in pursuit of transformative experiences. Conversely, DU students exhibit a higher proportion of neutral responses (17% vs. 9%), which may indicate consideration of additional factors or access to similar opportunities in their domestic context. Disagreement remains low at both institutions (3% at DU and 5% at PUST). These findings suggest that non-academic motivations, including independence and personal growth, are widely recognized as significant drivers for studying abroad, irrespective of institutional context.

The findings indicate that female students from both universities strongly agree that personal development and independence are primary motivations for studying abroad. While responses were generally consistent, students from Pabna University of Science and Technology exhibited slightly higher aspirations, suggesting a stronger desire to leave their local environment for transformative experiences. In contrast, students from the University of Dhaka reported a higher proportion of neutral responses, which may reflect consideration of other factors or the availability of comparable domestic opportunities. Disagreement was minimal at both institutions. Consequently, non-academic motivations, such as independence and personal growth, are widely recognized as significant drivers for studying abroad, regardless of institutional context.

Figure 4

Limited Research Opportunities Available in Bangladesh



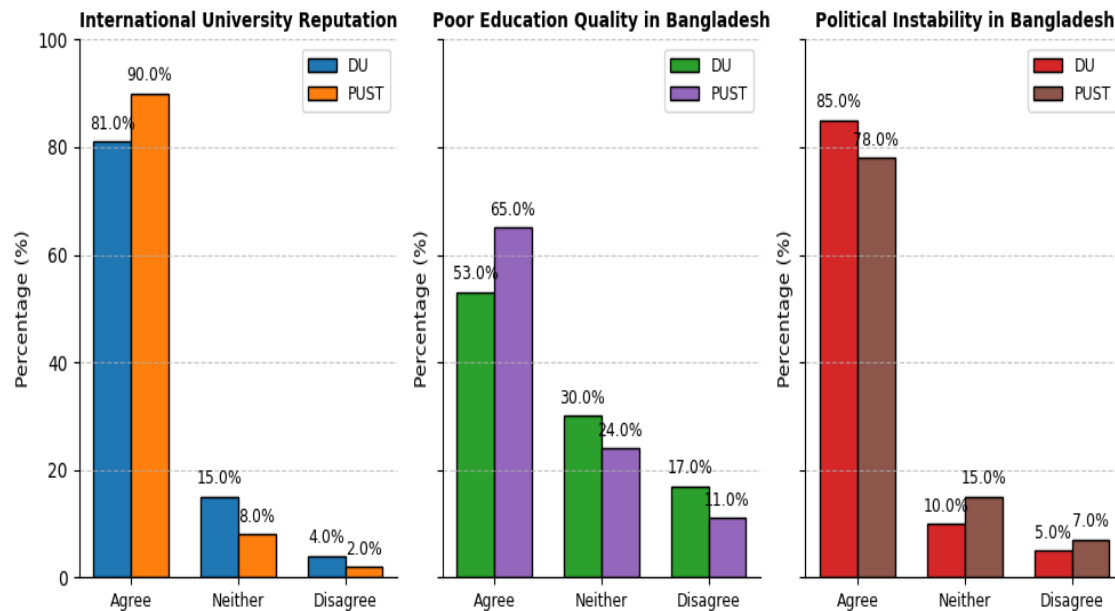
Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 4 shows that most students at both universities agree that limited research opportunities in Bangladesh motivate them to pursue studies abroad, with slightly higher agreement at PUST (87%) than at DU (83%). This suggests that PUST students may encounter more pronounced limitations in research facilities and supervision. The higher level of disagreement at DU (9%) compared to PUST (2%) suggests that some DU students perceive local research opportunities as inadequate, likely because they have access to superior research projects at a more prestigious institution. The proportion of neutral responses remains relatively balanced (8% at DU, 11% at PUST), implying that some students lack sufficient research experience to form a definitive judgment. In summary, research limitations constitute a significant motivating factor, especially for students from universities outside the primary academic centers.

Based on the findings, limited domestic research opportunities are a primary factor motivating students to study abroad; however, the strength of this perception varies by institution. Female students from Pabna University of Science and Technology, which has fewer resources, reported experiencing this pressure more acutely than their counterparts at the University of Dhaka. Conversely, a greater proportion of DU students expressed disagreement, suggesting that they perceive local research opportunities as relatively sufficient, likely due to the university's reputation and broader academic offerings. These results highlight structural inequalities, demonstrating that perceptions of research limitations are shaped by institutional context. Additionally, the presence of neutral responses implies that some students lack adequate research experience to fully evaluate the issue. Therefore, relying solely on limited research opportunities as a push factor is problematic, as it fails to account for disparities in university quality and differences in female students' awareness and academic exposure.

Factors of university reputation, politics, and local education in studying abroad

The aspirations of Bangladeshi female students to pursue studies abroad are not formed in a vacuum. Various factors interact with one another, ranging from the attractiveness of global academic reputation, evaluations of the quality of domestic education, to responses to national political conditions. A deeper understanding of the relative weight of each of these factors is important, as the institutional and geographical backgrounds of female students can significantly shape how they perceive opportunities and barriers to international education.

Figure 5*Factors Influencing Female Students for Studying Abroad*

Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 5 demonstrates that international university reputation receives the highest level of agreement among PUST female students (90%), surpassing DU (81%). This suggests that students from institutions with more limited resources, such as PUST, are more strongly motivated by the global prestige of foreign universities. In contrast, political instability is a more prominent issue among DU female students (85%) compared to PUST (78%), which may indicate greater sensitivity to political dynamics in the capital city. The inadequacy of local education is cited more frequently by PUST students (65%) than by DU students (53%), aligning with the limited access to quality education in regional areas. While overall disagreement remains low, the highest rate is observed for the education factor at DU (17%), suggesting that some DU female students still perceive domestic education as adequate. These findings indicate that institutional and geographical contexts play a significant role in shaping the prioritization of push factors for studying abroad among female students.

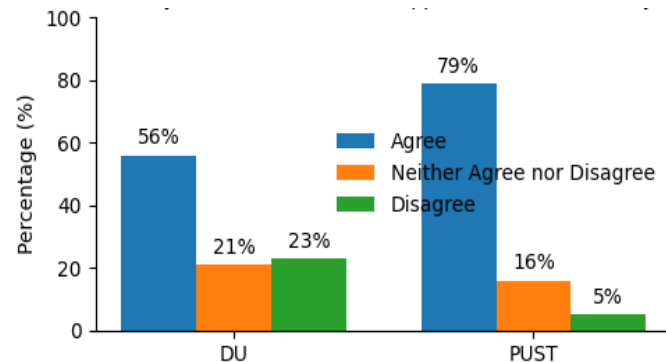
The findings indicate that the prioritization of push factors influencing overseas study is significantly shaped by institutional and geographical contexts. Female students from Pabna University of Science and Technology, located in a resource-limited region, are more motivated by the global reputation of foreign universities, viewing them as symbols of prestige and as alternatives to the inadequacies of local education. In contrast, female students from the University of Dhaka, situated in the capital, exhibit greater sensitivity to political instability, likely due to their direct exposure to national governance dynamics. Notably, some DU students continue to perceive domestic education as relatively adequate, a perspective seldom observed among PUST students. These results challenge the assumption that push factors are universal, demonstrating that geographical location and institutional status distinctly shape perceptions of threats and opportunities. Consequently, international education policies should avoid a uniform approach and instead address disparities in access, institutional capacity, and the geopolitical experiences of female students.

Mental and financial support from families of female students studying abroad

Family support is a determining factor in the success of female students in realizing their higher education aspirations, particularly when pursuing further studies abroad. This support can be moral or financial in nature and is strongly influenced by parents' perceptions of the value of international education. Understanding patterns of family support across institutions is important because they reflect how the immediate social environment responds to female students' plans to study abroad.

Figure 6

Family will Support Mentally and financially to Pursue Higher Education Abroad

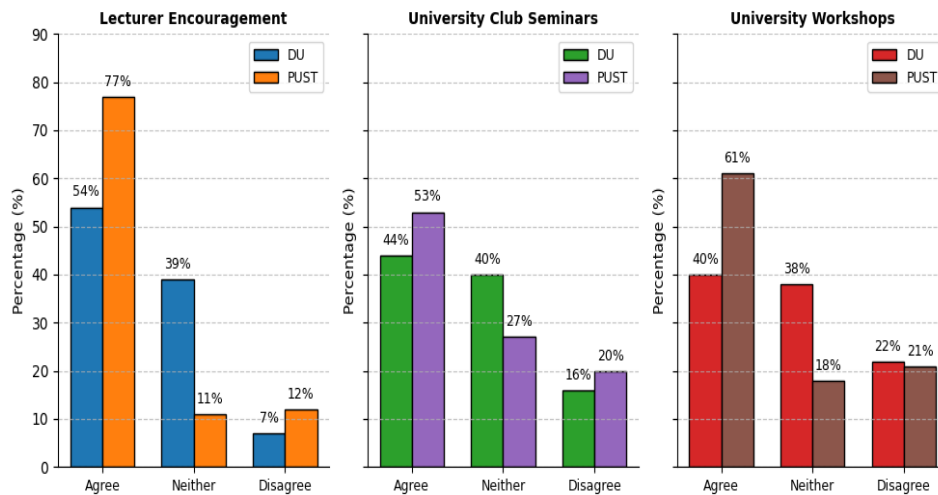


Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 6 illustrates a pronounced disparity in family support between PUST and DU students. A significantly higher proportion of PUST students (79%) reported agreement regarding family support for studying abroad, compared to 56% of DU students. This finding suggests that families of PUST students are more actively supportive, both mentally and financially. Conversely, 23% of DU students reported disagreement, compared with only 5% among PUST students, indicating that family-related barriers are more prevalent among DU students. Neutral responses were relatively similar (DU 21%, PUST 16%), representing individuals who have not yet secured definitive support. The elevated support among PUST students may be attributed to family perceptions that studying abroad offers a pathway to social mobility, particularly given limited local opportunities. In contrast, DU students, despite attending prestigious institutions, encounter greater family resistance, potentially due to parental beliefs in the sufficiency of domestic education or economic constraints. Overall, family support appears to be strongly shaped by institutional background and perceptions of the added value of international study.

Lecturers, seminars, workshops motivate female study-abroad aspirations

Institutional support significantly influences female students' aspirations to pursue higher education abroad. Such support may be provided by lecturers through mentorship and encouragement, as well as through structured activities including seminars, workshops, and information sessions on international scholarships. The intensity and quality of this support vary widely among universities, shaped by institutional resources, administrative policies, and academic culture. While some universities offer proactive guidance, others provide minimal assistance due to limited capacity or lower prioritization. Analyzing these patterns of support is essential for advancing women's participation in international education. Tailored interventions can reinforce weaker systems and replicate effective practices, thereby reducing gender-based disparities in access to global learning opportunities.

Figure 7*Motivating Factors for Female Students for Pursuing Higher Education Abroad*

Source: Fieldwork (2025).

Figure 7 shows that institutional support for studying abroad follows a consistent pattern, with PUST students perceiving significantly stronger encouragement than DU students across all aspects. The most notable difference is in faculty encouragement: 77% of PUST students agreed that their lecturers encouraged them, compared to only 54% in DU. This gap suggests that lecturers at PUST may be less proactive in providing information and motivation, possibly due to limited local academic opportunities. Regarding university seminar implementation, agreement in PUST (53%) was also higher than in DU (44%), although the moderate level suggests that seminar effectiveness has not yet reached an optimal level. Meanwhile, workshop programs again showed PUST's dominance (61%) over DU (40%), with a 21-point difference. Interestingly, DU had a higher neutral response rate for workshops (38%), indicating a lack of student participation or awareness. Thus, the institutional context strongly influences the intensity of support students perceive, with the more resource-constrained PUST actually encouraging study abroad more vigorously as an alternative for career advancement.

Discussion

This study identifies two principal findings regarding Bangladeshi female students' aspirations to pursue higher education abroad. First, study-abroad aspirations are shaped by the interaction of push factors including political instability, perceived low quality of domestic education, and limited research opportunities and pull factors, such as the international reputation of foreign universities, opportunities for personal development, independence, and family support. These factors position overseas education as a pathway to educational mobility, professional advancement, and self-development. Second, the findings demonstrate that institutional and family contexts significantly shape these aspirations. Female students at Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) receive stronger family and institutional support and are more strongly motivated by the reputation of foreign universities and limited local educational opportunities. In contrast, female students at the University of Dhaka (DU) experience greater family resistance, greater sensitivity to political instability, and stronger aspirations for independence. Overall, the findings indicate that study-abroad aspirations among

Bangladeshi female students are not solely responses to domestic constraints but also reflect strategic efforts to achieve social mobility, women's empowerment, and global educational opportunities, with institutional and geographical contexts influencing the relative importance of these motivations.

These findings are highly relevant to the global challenges of brain drain and unequal access to quality education, particularly in developing countries such as Bangladesh. Given the frequent political instability in South Asia (Aryal et al., 2024; Baral et al., 2024), studying abroad is often the only viable pathway for women to attain autonomy and improve their career prospects. This reflects significant social pressures, with families, especially those from higher socioeconomic backgrounds, perceiving overseas education as a prestigious investment (Rajan et al., 2024; Kaur & Mehra, 2024). Nevertheless, patriarchal values continue to constrain female mobility, as concerns regarding safety and family honor remain central (Walton-Roberts, 2015; Raghuram & Sondhi, 2021). Without reforms in the domestic education system and shifts in social attitudes, structural inequalities are likely to perpetuate academic outmigration (Singh, 2023).

Theoretically, these findings reinforce the hybrid push-pull model proposed by Chen (2017), as female students' migration decisions are influenced not only by external pull factors (e.g., global reputation) but also by strong domestic push factors (e.g., political instability) (Nikou & Luukkonen, 2023). However, this study adds critical gender and institutional dimensions. In contrast to the findings of Entrich et al. (2024), which suggested that institutional initiatives have little effect on intentions, this study shows that lecturer encouragement and workshops at PUST are perceived as stronger, indicating that the role of local institutions can moderate aspirations, particularly when the socio-economic structure is supportive. Furthermore, Wang's (2024) concept of "cosmopolitanism" applies only partially, as Bangladeshi female students are more motivated by academic survival needs and independence rather than solely by building cultural capital (Cordua & Netz, 2022; Reed & Johnson, 2023). The researchers' logic confirms that female educational migration is a complex strategy to counter structural constraints.

This study provides an understanding that the process of educational migration is not a linear journey, but rather a dynamic series of phases that include decision-making, lived experiences, and post-study transitions. As noted by McLeod and Wainwright (2009), initial pressures experienced abroad, if successfully managed, can enhance self-confidence. However, Udayanga (2024) highlights that mismatches between expectations and financial realities often disrupt students' well-being. Family and institutional support, therefore, function not merely as supportive factors but as a "safety net" that determines whether female students can persist in their studies (Cushner & Karim, 2004; Dwyer, 2004). In addition, this study suggests that the independence gained abroad (Ghimire & Barry, 2020) can transform gender roles upon return to the home country. Thus, a holistic understanding of the three phases of migrants' lives is essential for designing appropriate interventions (Makni, 2011; Kinginger, 2011).

Compared with previous studies, this research shows both similarities and significant differences. In line with findings from India (Arokkiaraj & Rajan, 2024) and Nepal (Aryal et al., 2024), political instability and the quality of domestic education emerge as key push factors. However, unlike a study conducted in Pakistan by Hussain et al. (2020), which reports higher migration intentions among male students, this study finds that Bangladeshi female students also demonstrate strong aspirations, particularly when supported by family and institutional encouragement. Sondhi and King (2017) note that Indian female students tend to concentrate in the social sciences, whereas the present study does not explicitly address STEM field preferences.

Another distinctive finding is that institutional support at Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) is stronger than at the University of Dhaka (DU), a dimension that has received limited attention in the literature on Nepal (Khapangi, 2024) and Pakistan (Javed et al., 2019). Thus, this study positions itself as a bridge between the classical push–pull framework and a more contextual gender institutional analysis.

Based on the findings, the recommended concrete actions cover three levels. First, universities in Bangladesh (especially DU) should strengthen career services, conduct regular workshops on studying abroad, and offer alumni mentorship programs. Second, families and communities need to be educated through awareness campaigns that female education is an investment, not a threat to cultural norms. The government can facilitate public dialogue to challenge traditional views that restrict women's mobility. Third, policymakers should improve the quality of domestic education and research facilities so that studying abroad becomes a choice rather than a necessity. Furthermore, partnerships with overseas universities through exchange programs and joint scholarships need to be expanded. Finally, the provision of pre-departure consultation services covering safety, financial, and psychological aspects will help female students navigate the transition more smoothly. Through these measures, structural barriers and social expectations can be gradually addressed.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Bangladeshi female students' aspirations to pursue higher education abroad represent a strategic negotiation between structural constraints and individual agency. Educational migration is driven by the interaction of domestic push factors, including political instability, perceived low quality of education, and limited research opportunities, and external pull factors, such as the international reputation of foreign universities, opportunities for self-development, independence, and family support. The findings further demonstrate that institutional and family contexts shape these aspirations differently across universities. Female students at Pabna University of Science and Technology (PUST) benefit from stronger family and institutional support, whereas those at the University of Dhaka (DU) experience greater family resistance while exhibiting stronger aspirations for independence and greater sensitivity to political instability. Overall, studying abroad is understood not merely as a response to domestic limitations but as a pathway toward educational mobility, women's empowerment, and broader social transformation.

This study contributes theoretically by extending the classical push–pull model through the integration of gender and institutional perspectives. The findings demonstrate that female students' migration aspirations are influenced not only by macro-level push and pull factors but also by variations in institutional support and family environments, thereby bridging the traditional push–pull framework with a more contextually grounded gender-institutional analysis. In practice, the study highlights the importance of strengthening universities as agents of information, mentoring, and internationalization by encouraging lecturers, workshops, and scholarship guidance. In addition, policies that foster positive family perceptions of women's international education and expand equitable access to global learning opportunities are essential for supporting female students' educational mobility.

This study has several limitations. First, it focuses exclusively on female students from two public universities in Bangladesh, limiting the generalizability of the findings to other institutional settings and national contexts. Second, the cross-sectional survey design captures students'

aspirations rather than their actual educational migration experiences or post-study outcomes. Third, broader structural factors, such as scholarship availability, visa regulations, labor-market opportunities, and long-term career trajectories, were beyond the scope of the present analysis. Future studies should therefore employ longitudinal or mixed-method approaches to examine the transition from study-abroad aspirations to actual migration experiences and post-graduation outcomes. Comparative research across public and private universities, different regions of Bangladesh, and other South Asian countries would also provide a more comprehensive understanding of how institutional capacity, family support, political conditions, and gender norms interact to shape female educational migration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We would like to express our sincere gratitude to all participants for their valuable time and contributions in completing the questionnaire, which enabled this study to be conducted smoothly and successfully.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

Nishat Tabassum: Conceptualization; Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Validation; Writing Review & Editing. **Faria Mubashira:** Data Curation; Formal Analysis; Methodology; Software; Visualization; Writing Original Draft; Validation.

REFERENCES

- Ahmed, S. K. (2024). How to choose a sampling technique and determine sample size for research: A simplified guide for researchers. *Oral Oncology Reports*, 12, 100662. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.oor.2024.100662>
- Alamgir, M. (2023). Number of students going abroad triples in 15 years despite university boom. *The Daily Star*. <https://www.thedailystar.net/news/bangladesh/news/number-students-going-abroad-triples-15-years-despite-university-boom-3397431>
- Arokkiaraj, H., & Rajan, S. I. (2024). Motivations among Indian students to study medicine in Eastern European countries. In S. I. Rajan (Ed.), *India migration report 2023* (pp. 170–181). Routledge India. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003490234>
- Aryal, D., Joshi, G., Regmi, N., & Kaphle, M. (2024). Harassment and psychological distress among young women traveling in public vehicles: Descriptive cross-sectional study in a metropolitan city, Nepal. *Archives of Psychiatry*, 2(1), 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.33696/Psychiatry.2.014>
- Bangladesh Bureau of Educational Information and Statistics. (2023). *Bangladesh Education Statistics 2022*. Ministry of Education, Government of the People's Republic of Bangladesh. <https://banbeis.gov.bd/pages/files/69199761933eb65569ddc65b>
- Baral, E., Adhikari, B. P., & Gurung, R. (2024). Unveiling motivational factors driving Nepali students to pursue higher education abroad. *OCEM Journal of Management, Technology & Social Sciences*, 3(1), 18–25. <https://doi.org/10.3126/ocemjmtss.v3i1.62221>
- Cascini, F., Pantovic, A., Al-Ajlouni, Y. A., Puleo, V., De Maio, L., & Ricciardi, W. (2024). Health data sharing attitudes towards primary and secondary use of data: A systematic review. *eClinicalMedicine*, 71, 102551. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eclinm.2024.102551>

- Chen, J. M. (2017). Three levels of push-pull dynamics among Chinese international students' decision to study abroad in the Canadian context. *Journal of International Students*, 7(1), 113–135. <https://doi.org/10.32674/jis.v7i1.248>
- Connolly, H., Delimata, N., Galway, K., Kiely, B., Lawler, M., Mulholland, J., O'Grady, M., & Connolly, D. (2024). Exploration of evaluation practices in social prescribing services in Ireland: A cross-sectional observational study. *Healthcare (Basel, Switzerland)*, 12(2), 219. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12020219>
- Cordua, F., & Netz, N. (2022). Why do women more often intend to study abroad than men? *Higher Education*, 83(5), 1079–1101. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-021-00731-6>
- Cushner, K., & Karim, A. U. (2004). Study abroad at the university level. In D. Landis, J. M. Bennett, & M. J. Bennett (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (3rd ed., pp. 289–307). Sage Publications. <https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452231129>
- De Pilli, T., Alessandrino, O., & Baiano, A. (2024). Quantitative descriptive analysis as a strategic tool in research activities relating to innovative meat tenderisation technologies. *Heliyon*, 10(11), e32618. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2024.e32618>
- Dwyer, M. M. (2004). More is better: The impact of study abroad program duration. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 10, 151–163. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v10i1.139>
- Entrich, S. R., Netz, N., & Matsuoka, R. (2024). The role of institutional contexts for social inequalities in study abroad intent and participation. *Higher Education*, 1–29. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10734-023-01170-1>
- Fakunle, O. (2021). Developing a framework for international students' rationales for studying abroad, beyond economic factors. *Policy Futures in Education*, 19(6), 671–690. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1478210320965066>
- Ghimire, N., & Barry, K. (2020). Interrupting the middle: Shifting everyday practices of female Nepalese students in Australia. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 41(5), 607–622. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07256868.2020.1806804>
- Granato, S., Havari, E., Mazzarella, G., & Schnepf, S. V. (2024). Study abroad programmes and student outcomes: Evidence from Erasmus. *Economics of Education Review*, 99, Article 102510. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.econedurev.2024.102510>
- Hussain, S., Usman, A., Gillani, A., & Amjad, A. (2021). Students' perceptions of emigration to foreign countries for higher education: Evidence from a Pakistani university. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 31(6), 782–798. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2020.1820415>
- Javed, B., Zainab, B., Zakai, S. N., & Malik, S. (2019). Perceptions of international student mobility: A qualitative case study. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 6(2), 269–287. <https://doi.org/10.22555/joeed.v6i2.2340>
- Kabir, H. (2021). Notion of belonging in the nation-state: Gendered construction of international migration aspirations among university students in Bangladesh. *Migration Letters*, 18(4), 463–476. <https://doi.org/10.33182/ml.v18i4.1158>
- Kaur, T., & Mehra, A. (2024). Strategic choices for educational crossroads: Investigating the variables in parental decision-making for international education. *Journal of Economics, Finance and Management*, 3(3), 681–689. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11288442>

- Kelly, M. M., Martin-Peters, T., & Farber, J. S. (2024). Secondary data analysis: Using existing data to answer new questions. *Journal of Pediatric Health Care*, 38(4), 615–618. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pedhc.2024.03.005>
- Khapangi, M. B. (2024). Demographic and socio-economic characteristics of student migration in Nepal. *Kutumbha Vani*, 5(1), 61–70. <https://doi.org/10.3126/kv.v5i1.70889>
- Kharel, D. (2022). Student migration from Nepal to Japan: Factors behind the steep rise. *Asian and Pacific Migration Journal*, 31(1), 26–51. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01171968221085766>
- Khatun, F., Saadat, S. Y., Mahbub, A., Joita, M. R., & Taki, M. A. T. T. (2024). *Gen Z's employment expectations: An exploratory study in Bangladesh*. Centre for Policy Dialogue & Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Bangladesh.
- King, R., & Sondhi, G. (2018). International student migration: A comparison of UK and Indian students' motivations for studying abroad. *Globalisation, Societies and Education*, 16(2), 176–191. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14767724.2017.1405244>
- Kinginger, C. (2011). Enhancing language learning in study abroad. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 31, 58–73. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0267190511000031>
- Kölbel, A. (2020). Imaginative geographies of international student mobility. *Social & Cultural Geography*, 21(1), 86–104. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14649365.2018.1460861>
- Makni, V. (2011). Student migration potential: The case of Bulgaria. *South-Eastern Europe Journal of Economics*, 9(2), 187–206. <https://ojs.lib.uom.gr/index.php/seeje/article/view/5473>
- McLeod, M., & Wainwright, P. (2009). Researching the study abroad experience. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(1), 66–71. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1028315308317219>
- Mulvaney, M. K. (2017). The long-term impact of study abroad on honors program alumni. *Frontiers: The Interdisciplinary Journal of Study Abroad*, 29(1), 46–67. <https://doi.org/10.36366/frontiers.v29i1.385>
- Nikou, S., & Luukkonen, M. (2023). The push-pull factor model and its implications for the retention of international students in the host country. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning*, 14(3), 76–94. <https://doi.org/10.1108/HESWBL-04-2023-0084>
- Pérez-Guerrero, E. E., Guillén-Medina, M. R., Márquez-Sandoval, F., Vera-Cruz, J. M., Gallegos-Arreola, M. P., Rico-Méndez, M. A., Aguilar-Velázquez, J. A., & Gutiérrez-Hurtado, I. A. (2024). Methodological and statistical considerations for cross-sectional, case-control, and cohort studies. *Journal of clinical medicine*, 13(14), 4005. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm13144005>
- Raghuram, P., & Sondhi, G. (2021). Gender and international student migration. In C. Mora & S. Piper (Eds.), *The Palgrave handbook of gender and migration* (pp. 221–235). Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-63347-9>
- Rahim, R. (2025). Migratory stress of Bangladeshi international students in Canadian postsecondary institutions. *Journal of International Students*, 15(1), 77–98. <https://doi.org/10.32674/zx4w0389>
- Rahman, Z. (2022). Dearth of research culture in higher education in Bangladesh. *The Business Standard*. <https://www.tbsnews.net/thoughts/dearth-research-culture-higher-education-bangladesh-491050>
- Rajan, S. I., Cherian, A. P., & Alencherry, N. P. (2024). International student migration: Family-mediated migration trajectories. In S. I. Rajan (Ed.), *India migration report 2023* (pp. 28–41). Routledge India. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003490234>

- Rashid, S. R. (2024). Social backgrounds, capitals and risks in youth migration from Bangladesh. In S. I. Rajan (Ed.), *South Asia migration report 2024* (pp. 121–141). Routledge India. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003521228>
- Reed, E., & Johnson, B. (2023). Overview of cultural capital theory's current impact and potential utility in academic libraries. *The Journal of Academic Librarianship*, 49(6), 102782. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acalib.2023.102782>
- Singh, K. (2023). *Lee's theory of migration: Intervening obstacles model*. Pan Geography. <https://pangeography.com/lees-theory-of-migration/>
- Skariah, A., & Sivarenjini, B. (2024). Dynamics of international student migration: An explorative study in the context of Kerala, India. *AIDASCO Reviews*, 2(1), 57–67. <https://doi.org/10.59783/aire.2024.46>
- Sondhi, G., & King, R. (2017). Gendering international student migration: An Indian case-study. *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 43(8), 1308–1324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369183X.2017.1300288>
- Tamang, M. K., & Shrestha, M. (2021). Let me fly abroad: Student migrations in the context of Nepal. *Research in Educational Policy and Management*, 3(1), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.46303/repam.2021.1>
- Trelfa, D., Yamada, A., & Koyama, Y. (2024). Globalisation and higher education: Increased foreign media consumption and global mobility aspirations among Japanese college students: Implications for international education. In J. Zajda (Ed.), *Fourth international handbook of globalisation, education and policy research* (pp. 189–204). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-67667-3_10
- Udayanga, S. (2024). Challenges in navigating the education-migration pathways, and subjective well-being of highly educated immigrants: The case of Indian student immigrants in the United Kingdom. *Frontiers in Sociology*, 9, 1–14. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fsoc.2024.1385664>
- UNESCO. (2024). *Number of students in higher education more than doubled in 20 years, but inequalities remain*. <https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/number-students-higher-education-more-doubled-20-years-inequalities-remain>
- Walton-Roberts, M. (2015). Femininity, mobility and family fears: Indian international student migration and transnational parental control. *Journal of Cultural Geography*, 32(1), 68–82. <https://doi.org/10.1080/08873631.2014.1000561>
- Wang, X. (2024). Socioeconomic status, cosmopolitanism, and educational aspirations: A study of China's middle-class students pursuing higher education in the U.S. amidst geopolitical tensions. *International Journal of Chinese Education*, 13(2). <https://doi.org/10.1177/2212585X241253914>
- Zaman, N. T., Sohel, M. S., Obaidullah, M., Hossen, M. S., Rahman, M. T., Sifullah, M. K., & Sarker, M. F. H. (2023). Factors shaping Bangladeshi students' migration decision using push-pull theory: A focus group study. *SN Social Sciences*, 4(1). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s43545-023-00797-2>